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A storied photo album of parents' positioning and the landscape of schools

BY

Debbie Ann Pushor ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

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DEDICATION

For my sons

Cohen, Teague, and Quinn

whose presence in my life

has awakened me to

parent knowledge

and has given me a new lens

through which to view the landscape of schools.

ABSTRACT

This study is a year long narrative inquiry into parents' positioning in relation to the landscape of schools.

Prior to beginning the inquiry, I lived an educator's story of schooling. I had seen school from many different places on the professional knowledge landscape and from many different vantage points. Yet my knowledge did not prepare me for my experience as a parent on my son, Cohen's, first day of school. While Cohen was welcomed into his kindergarten classroom, I was directed to a portable at the back of the school, where I listened to what the school staff's expectations of me as parent were, and where I was asked to wait outside the school at pick up times until the program aide came to open the doors. This first experience left me wondering about the lack of place and voice of parents on the school landscape.

I spent a year in Gardenview School, a large suburban elementary school in Edmonton, Alberta, a mid-Western city. I joined Gardenview School as a participant observer—as someone who intended to live inside the situation, to become a part of it, and as someone who intended to step outside the life of the school at times, to think about what I was experiencing and to write about it. As an insider, I became a part of the life of the school as a 'member' of the staff and as a 'member' of the parent community. As an outsider, I carried my notebook with me all the time, writing observations and reflections whenever I could, taking notes at the meetings, recording key details during special events, jotting down things I was reminded of or things I wanted to think more about. My stance shifted as participant observer; sometimes I was more a participant in the life of the school, sometimes I was more an observer of it.

Using a metaphor of a photo album in my dissertation, I create 'snapshots' with my words that portray significant moments in my research experience. I bring those images to life by surrounding them with 'memorybank movies'—by enlarging them with stories that tell what is not visible and what is not audible in the snapshots. I then 'look beyond the images,' both the stilled and the moving, to share my wonders about how these experiences show the positioning of parents in relation to the landscape of

schools.

My dissertation raises wonders about "seeing small" in schools rather than "seeing big" (Greene, 1995), about who gets to "play" in schools (Paley, 1992), about hospitality, about ownership and "Who decides?" I explore parents' experiences of the structure of schooling through the metaphor of a protectorate in which educators, as holders of professional knowledge about teaching and learning, assume ownership of the ground of school, establishing programs, policies, and procedures in the interests of children and their families. I imagine new possibilities for shifting the positioning of parents in relation to the landscape of schooling as well as changing the storied structure of the landscape.

Living both the story of educator and the story of parent, and attending to the multiplicity and complexity inherent in those positions, I provide a number of lenses through which to see the issues surrounding the positioning of parents in relation to school landscapes. My snapshots and my stories, my wonders and my imaginings, are intended to pull forward readers' stories, to cause readers to relive their own experiences, to cause readers to rethink what they know about schooling.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people who have traveled with me on this doctoral journey. As I flip backward and forward through the pages of my photo album, gazing at the photographs which capture significant moments and memories, I am drawn to images of individuals who have touched my life and my work during this journey. I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to:

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***"Gardenview" staff and parents** – for the gift of a place within your circle*

***Michelle** – for risking imagining, and living, a new story of parent/teacher relationships*

***Dianne** – for being committed to never going away*

***Lorayne and Shirley** – for being there when I was challenged to find the time to be both mom and graduate student*

***Mom and Dad** – for raising me to believe I can do and be anything I dream*

***Cohen, Quinn, and Teague** – for being open to create and recreate our family life in so many different ways as this journey unfolded*

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Images of the Landscape of Schools

The First Day of School: Thoughts, Images, Memories

I can replay in my mind taking Cohen to his first morning of kindergarten just as if it was being replayed on VHS tape. That this memory remains so clear to me speaks of the significance of that moment in my life. This, Cohen's first morning in the formal school system, marked a rite of passage, a moving to and a moving from for Cohen, and a stepping back and trusting for me. Since Cohen is my oldest child, the particular school environment to which he was going was unfamiliar for both of us. This made the trusting that much harder.

As I helped Cohen get ready for school and listened to his excited chatter, I outwardly smiled and displayed excitement in response. Inwardly, I was struggling to understand and to put a rational frame around the emotions I was experiencing. My mind raced and my heart ached with the flood of thoughts, images, memories flowing through me: my image of Cohen at his birth as I held him for the first time, the feel of his body in my arms, his beautiful smile, his sense of humor, the shyness he displays at surprising moments, his enthusiastic response to stories, his two year old voice reciting Humpty Dumpty, his holding my face between his hands as he tells me important things. How can it be time for him to begin school? How can I leave him with a teacher who doesn't know all these things about him? How can she possibly love him as much as I do?

And yet she has to!

Will she recognize when he's feeling shy and be there to support him? Will she see and celebrate his love of books and have time to listen as he talks his way through the story? Will she have time to respond as he asks his many questions? Will she recognize that when he's loud and boisterous it's best to respond by being calm and positive?

She has to!

Will she see all the wonderful things about him and know that he's a great kid?

Does she know how precious the gift I am sharing with her is?

She has to!

Before we left home and set off for school, I had Cohen pose for a picture in front of our house. He stood in the sunshine, holding his backpack, smiling up at me. This transition to school was one of life's significant moments and, like his first tooth and his first step, it, too, had to be captured forever. For a moment at least I felt able to freeze this passage of time.

Struck by the intensity of emotion I was feeling, I paused and thought back to all my years of being a teacher or a principal and to all of the other 'first days' I experienced. Did I have any idea then of how significant this first morning of school is for parents? Did I have any idea of the emotions parents may have been struggling with as their child started school? What I remember is that sleepless night before the first day of school, tossing and turning in excitement and anticipation as I wondered about the students who would be coming, about how the day would unfold, about whether I'd thought of and planned for everything. I remember checking the clock every few minutes all night long wondering if it was time to get up, worrying that if I didn't settle soon I'd never get any sleep. I can also bring to mind vivid and various recollections of conversations with colleagues in the staffroom that first morning, comparing notes on how many times we'd looked at the clock or been up pacing the floor during the night, about the crazy or funny dreams we'd had of how our plans for our first day unfolded or about incidents with our students, about how we'd planned and replanned the day over and over again as we lay staring at the ceiling, waiting for streaks of daylight to appear.

I remember, too, that for students, the first day of school was filled with emotions. I can feel those emotions again as fragments of memory appear like a kaleidoscope in my mind—the schools, the children, the moments! I remember so many faces bright and eager, shining with excitement. I remember others wet with tears or pale with concern. I remember some who were set with determination or filled with resistance. Memories come easily of celebrating the first day of school with those children who were eager and excited, of comforting and assuring others, and of holding and rocking a few. But where are my memories of their parents on that morning? Why don't I have that same flood of images, of recalled moments and conversations, when I think about what their parents were feeling? My heart aches as I recognize that I am unable to search out memories of parents on these 'first days' of school.

Shaking myself from the past, I recognized that only the time of photos and memories can be frozen whereas present time demanded that we move on. We walked to school that morning, Cohen beside me and Teague and Quinn in their stroller. The air was filled with nervous excitement as children and families connected along the way, greeting each other, exchanging questions and wonders about first day procedures, and asking each other about which teachers they have this year and about which friends are in their class. Many parents stood outside the kindergarten entrance talking together, sharing feelings about their children's placements, while they waited for the bell to ring. Although these last few minutes were anxious and emotional ones for me, I forced my emotions back, responding warmly to the gestures of others, introducing myself and my family, trying to appear outwardly calm. When the bell finally rang, it sent a wave of emotion through me and I had to swallow hard to keep back my tears.

Inside the kindergarten classroom, I introduced Cohen to his teacher and gave him a big hug and kiss. He said good-bye and turned happily to join the other children on the carpet in the reading corner. I believed he was going to be happy there and I truly was excited for him. The tears burning at the back of my eyes were not for Cohen, they were for me.

The kindergarten program aide was waiting outside the classroom and as parents finished their goodbyes she directed us to a portable at the back of the school. There, she explained, she would provide us with information about the kindergarten program and answer any questions we might have.

As Teague, Quinn and I moved away from the kindergarten classroom toward the portable, the school principal came across the library to greet us. Hanna[1] and I were friends, having worked together at another point in time. When Hanna gave me a hug and asked how I was doing, the tears I had been holding back all morning began to flow. I apologized for crying, feeling embarrassed by my response since I was an educator, yet nevertheless being overwhelmed by my emotions as a parent. I emphasized how glad I was that she was Cohen's first principal. I told her I had confidence in the school. I told her my emotion came, not from concerns with his school setting, but from the feeling that I was leaving him with individuals who knew so little about him. As I told her what I felt, she validated my thoughts with her own tears. She told me some of her 'mom stories'—of times when she, too, had to step back in her son's life. She told me this morning her son was starting junior high and she was feeling the same things I was all over again. Her being there made a difference for me.

Hanna's response to me and how much it mattered caused me to slip back again into my earlier thoughts of previous first days of school—first days as an educator. As a teacher, I always planned extensively for that first day of school for children. Hours and days went into preparation—talking about and arranging the classroom space to make it inviting for children, planning activities to welcome and invite students into the classroom community, setting out materials and supplies. As a principal, I always planned extensively for that first day of school for staff and for students. Here again, hours and days went into the planning of the opening staff meeting and the first school assembly—the stories to share, the messages to send, the symbols to use, the environment to create. Yet, now I wondered, who plans that first day of school for parents? Why aren't the hours and days that we put into preparing for the entry of children and staff into a new school year also put into preparing for the entry of parents?

---

[1] Pseudonyms have been used to protect the anonymity of my research school and the participants in my study, including parents, children, staff and principal. Actual names have been used for my family members, the places I have worked, government representatives, members of the media, Dianne Williamson and Michelle Maiani. Other than myself, my family members, Dianne and Michelle, the people represented in my photos are unconnected with the study.

With these thoughts I continued, with Teague and Quinn, to make my way to the portable where the kindergarten aide was meeting with parents. Seeing the room set up with a play space for our preschoolers and seeing coffee was on, I felt a sense of relief. Apparently someone planned for parents and we were going to have an opportunity to share our thoughts and feelings, to tell our stories of our children as they moved through this significant passage. I settled Teague and Quinn on a blanket on the floor with some toys and then poured a coffee for myself. The kindergarten aide began sharing information, which she explained, the kindergarten teachers determined we would need as parents to support our children's program: information about backpacks, inside shoes, snacks, entry and dismissal times. She told us there was concern last year, from teachers with classrooms close to the kindergarten, because of the hallway noise as parents with small children came to pick up kindergartners at early dismissal time. As a result, a decision had been made that parents were to wait outside the school until the program aide opened the door to let us in. I felt like I'd been slapped! I remember feeling like an intruder—someone who couldn't be trusted to be quiet in the hallways, someone who didn't belong in the school! I remember being shocked at how different school feels when you're the parent and not the educator. At that point in time I, too, needed a place on the school landscape and yet there didn't seem to be one for me. My question about who plans for parents hadn't been answered at all; this meeting was still part of the planning done for the re-entry of students and teachers!

A Photo Album of Life's Moments and Memories: Visualizing the Professional Knowledge Landscape

My son's first day of kindergarten will forever hold a place in my memories. My picture of Cohen, taken before we left for school, has found its place in our family photo album. I am reminded of how that day marked a passage for Cohen. I am reminded of how that day marked a passage for me as well.

Where would a photo of me, had one been taken that day, fall in an album of my life's moments and memories? Tracing time back through the pages of my photo album, you would catch glimpses of my maternal days surrounding Teague and Quinn's shared birth and before that Cohen's birth. Even further back, you would see shots that told you about my life as an educator: a snapshot taken in Room 1 at the Centre for Education as I shared my memory box from my first year as supervisor with consultants on Team 1, a photo of me reading a story to children at a school-wide assembly as principal of Julia Kiniski School, a picture of a farewell dinner at a gasthaus in Germany celebrating the time we shared there as teachers. Continuing that backward look, you catch a snap of our consulting services team dressed up in flamingo garb at the district's slowpitch tournament, and, moving right to the front of that photo album, you see a photograph of my first classroom, Room 4 at Aldergrove School, where I began my teaching career.

Moving forward in time, from Cohen's first morning of kindergarten, you continue to see many shots of me with my children. You catch a glimpse of me on the carpet with children in Cohen's kindergarten class during circle time, you find a photo in which I'm scooping jello into baggies for a color mixing activity in Cohen's Grade 1 classroom, you stumble upon a picture of me with Cohen's Grade 2/3 class hiking at Elk Island National Park. You may even see a shot of me involved in discussion at a school council meeting or find me in a photograph of parents cooking hotdogs at the school's family barbecue. You probably sensed the change in my relationship with school as you flipped through my photo album. You observed the many different places and different vantage points from which I experienced schooling. You visually witnessed, as you looked through my photos, my passage from educator places to a new place within school, the place of a parent.

As you can see, I came to being a parent of a school-aged child with a great deal of experience with schooling. My career spanned, in time, twenty years, in place, a variety of classrooms, schools and offices both near and far, and in space, positions as teacher, consultant, principal and central services supervisor. As I flip through my photo album pages, the multitude of images representing my experiences of schooling unfold in my mind to form a much-used and much-loved, worn, yet vivid, map of places travelled, of fellow travellers, of sights seen and of sights unseen. As I relive moments and memories, as I move backwards and forwards in time, the landscape of schooling on which I travelled forms a strong picture for me. I see in it hills and open fields, playgrounds and school buildings, bricks and glass blocks, open areas and cozy corners. I see in it lessons and assemblies, stories and music, play and paper, concerts and conferences. I see in it emotions and expressions, hopes and possibilities, beliefs and actions, wonderings and connections. You see, to me, while the landscape of schools is physical it is also so much more than that. It is a landscape of relationships, of ideas, of content, of process, of emotions, of knowing. Clandinin and Connelly (1995) refer to it as a "professional knowledge landscape" (p. 3). You can see, just by looking at my career history, that "space, place and time" all play a part in forming this professional knowledge landscape. You can probably also see the "sense of expansiveness" of this landscape and how it is "filled with diverse people, things, and events in different relationships" (p. 4).

One way we experience our landscape is related to how we are positioned on it. From certain positions, I have full view of some things while other things are partially obstructed or even hidden from my view. From the vantage point of teacher at Aldergrove School, my gaze rested mainly on the children I taught and on issues that directly affected their programming and their lives at school. As a district consultant, this new vantage point brought into focus the teaching and learning of teachers, as well as students, and, from this positioning, I saw my landscape through a different lens. As a principal, things on the landscape previously partially or fully obstructed from my view, became visible. District regulations, policies and procedures became foregrounded, and district priorities, building maintenance and finances became as real a part of my landscape as students and teachers.

When I became a parent of a school-aged child, I had already lived a story of schooling for a long time. I had seen school from many different places on the landscape and from many different vantage points. Therefore, moving to my new position, that of parent, was one I thought I would move to easily. After all, I knew schools well. But my sense of knowing betrayed me! Because of my knowing, my experience as a parent on that first day of school was all the more shocking and isolating. This first experience began in me a process still underway—a rethinking of what I know about schools. It created in me a stirring, a tiny dark pang which left me wondering about the lack of place and voice of parents on a landscape which, though previously familiar, now seemed foreign. This day marked the beginning of "my coming to consciousness" (Lugones, 1987, p. 3) as a parent positioned in the margins of the school landscape—on the edges of the school stories being composed and lived out there.

Zooming in on Parent Knowledge on the Professional Knowledge Landscape

At home on the morning of Cohen's first day of kindergarten, the thoughts and memories flooding through me reflected my parent knowledge, my

> ...body of convictions and meanings , [both] conscious [and] unconscious, that have arisen from [my] experience (intimate, social, and traditional) and that are expressed in [my] practices. ...It is a kind of knowledge, that has arisen from circumstances, practices, and undergoings that themselves had affective content for [me]. (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p. 7)

In my home and in my interconnections with Cohen, my parent knowledge holds a primary place of importance. This parent knowledge has grown in depth and complexity as my time and experience as Cohen's mom expanded. Through our constant contact, through the shared living of our lives, I have come to know Cohen in a way that is unique to me. Wanting a place, a space, a time to share that knowing with Cohen's teacher, with those people who were now going to play a significant role in his life, was important to me that morning. What I learned, as I stood outside of the school and outside of Cohen's classroom, was that my position as parent was not an integral one to the "story of schooling" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). I listened to what the school staff's expectations of me as parent were, yet I was not given a reciprocal opportunity to share my parent knowing of Cohen with the school staff. My position as parent was one located on the margins of the school landscape. As I flip back through our family album once again to the photos of Cohen's first day of kindergarten, I am struck by the symbolic nature of Cohen's solitary image in front of the school, seated on the school bench. Cohen had been given a place that morning, I had not. I had not been welcomed as a parent onto the landscape. I was to stay, at best, on the edges. I was not to be a part of the story. I left the school feeling that my parent knowledge had a space and place only within our home and on the landscape of our family.

Zooming Out to Expand the Images

If you continue to look through my photo album, you will see more than just photos of my life as an educator and my life as a parent. My life experiences position me in other places too. As I share some photos of the farm on which I was raised, I can't help but be drawn into a group of photos taken during our visit to the farm this past Labour Day weekend. Just as September is a time of separation for children from their families, it is also a time of separation for the cattle on the farm. Calves born in spring spend the summer with the cows on the pastureland, drinking their mothers' milk and growing stronger and more independent. As summer wanes, calves are old enough to be weaned from their mothers and to be fed hay and grain.

The process of weaning calves from cows is intense and requires many people, stationed throughout cattle pens and alleyways, to move the cattle and the calves apart. Because I was at the farm this past September, I was asked to help. When we climbed into the pen to begin the separation, the cows started moving restlessly away from us, yet keeping us in their sight, seemingly suspicious of our presence. As the anxiety of the cows and calves grew, so did the emotion I was feeling. My three sons were sitting on the top railing of the fence watching our work with the cattle.

Although they wanted to help, my motherly concern for their safety prevented me from allowing them to be in the pen with cows who were running and excited, anxious to protect their own young. The concern I felt for my children was mirrored in the loud and urgent calls and the frantic movement of the cows. As a mother, I could not stop thinking about how much I loved my children and how I would react if someone tried to take them from me. With tears close to the surface and with a tight knot in my stomach, I worked with the others to move the cows and calves forward and into a place where they could be separated.

As the group of cattle was pushed forward and the calves were steered out of the large corral into a smaller side corral, the intensity of the noise and movement heightened. Cows started bawling and running toward the fenced barrier between them and their calves. Calves bleated in response, trying to push their heads through the fence boards to get closer to their mothers, eyes wide with fear, sides pushing in and out, in and out, in response to their rapid breathing. It was my task to stand by the corral fence which separated the mothers and their babies, directing the cows back into the larger herd and away from the calves corralled behind me. As much as I wanted to let the cows return to their babies, I did my job and tried to push them out. There were some cows that continued to circle back to either stand staring at me, the barrier between them and their calves, bawling loudly with open mouths, or to run along the fence searching and calling for their babies. It was these cows that brought back to me the memory of Cohen's first day of kindergarten. It was these cows that rekindled in me the tears and emotions of that first day of parting.

As I worked intensely and consciously to separate these cows from their calves, my thoughts moved from being a parent at school opening back in time to being an educator on those first few days of school. I began to wonder how many other times I may have unconsciously been part of such a process of separation. I wonder if, as a teacher or as a principal, I also 'stood' separating a child and his/her parent as I encouraged a child to enter a classroom or assured a parent that it was okay to leave his/her child at school and go. It makes me think of what Frye (1983) calls "arrogant perception" (Lugones, 1987, p. 4), a sense of standing in one place, seeing someone in another place, and thinking one knows his/her situation. In thinking back to those times of separation, I wonder if I made a judgment about a parent's action or inaction without knowing the individual or knowing much about his/her experience of this separation.

I will never forget the time in my first year of teaching when I requested a meeting with the parents of two of my students. The sisters, Melissa and Melody, were friendly, caring children who were thoughtful of others yet no other students wanted to work with them during partner or group work. The reason was not a social one but a physical one. The girls smelled badly, their hair was dirty and tangled and their clothes unkempt. Out of care and concern for the girls, I sent a note home asking their parents to come see me. I did not indicate in the note what the meeting was to be about. When the time of our meeting arrived, the parents strolled in holding hands. Their hair, too, was long and stringy, matted and uncombed. Both parents' mouths were marked by missing or decayed teeth. Their clothes were caked with dirt and smelled of body odors. I quickly saw how naive my request for this meeting had been and I was both embarrassed and humbled by it. I was forced to face my "arrogant perception," to leave my "world" (p. 3), and to travel to theirs where I could begin to identify with them…to begin to imagine the complexities and multiplicities of their lives.

> Only through this travelling to [their] world could I identify with [them] because only then could I cease to ignore [them] and to be excluded and separate from [them]. Only then could I see [them] as…subject[s] even if one[s] subjected and only then could I see at all how meaning could arise fully between us. We are fully dependent on each other for the possibility of

> being understood and without this understanding we are not intelligible, we do not make sense, we are not solid, visible, integrated; we are lacking.
> (Lugones, 1987, p. 8)

I quickly decided to share samples of the girls' writing and to celebrate the growth evident within it. During the time we spent together, I learned much about their family—and much about myself.

In examining the place and voice of parents in relation to the landscape of schooling, and in sharing my stories as a parent, "I am not interested in assigning responsibility. I am interested in understanding the phenomenon so as to understand a loving way out of it" (p. 6). I believe the experiences I have had as a parent, and that other parents have had, are not the result of the actions of careless or uncaring educators but instead the result of an educational system not structured to encourage " 'travelling' between 'worlds' " (p. 11). My concern in this inquiry is those parents and educators who live within separate worlds—those who are at ease in their own worlds, knowing and accepting the norms of their own world, having bonds with others and a shared history, yet seldom travelling to each others' worlds. Such travelling would require educators to enter the parents' worlds, to see parents through parents' eyes, to attend to parents' own sense of themselves from within the parents' worlds and to attend to parents' construction of educators from within the parents' worlds. Similarly, this travelling would require entry into the educators' worlds by parents. Only as we travel to the other's world, can we identify with one another and "understand what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes" (p. 17).

As I think about world travelling, I continue to lay my stories as educator beside my stories as parent, continuing to try and see these stories of experience from both worlds. As I think about the landscape of schools, I think about how my stories as a parent are different from my stories as a teacher and how I need to reflect on both my teacher stories of parents and my parent stories to understand the landscape of schools more expansively.

Images of Parents Positioned Off the School Landscape

Meet the Staff Night: Thoughts, Images, Memories

Images and sounds from times spent at my dad's auction mart as a young girl swirl inside my head as my husband and I walk home from "Meet the Staff Night." Tuesdays were cattle sales and on those days the 'mart' was busy and crowded, filled with people engaged in purposeful and fast-paced activity. Cattle were being unloaded from trucks at the back chutes and being moved through the maze of alleyways and pens, onto the scale, into the auction ring, and then back out through the ordered maze again. Watching in the back, behind the auction ring, brought me close to this rush of activity. It gave me the chance to observe the people who were involved in managing this movement of cattle and to hear their voices shouting directions and responses back and forth to each other as they filled pens, as they tagged cattle and moved them in and out of the ring, as they directed the trucks which came and went at the chutes. Watching in the back always caused me to wonder how the cattle felt as they bawled and pushed, unaware of where they were going, but generally rushing forward with the others. Now and then a cow would try to run through a gate or clamber over a fence, panicked by the noise and confusion of this strange place. When that happened, the cattlemen would charge over and maneuver the animal back into its pen. Each time I watched, the movement and pattern of sale day was the same. Each day displayed this same ceaseless and discordant pace until the sale ended, the auction mart emptied and the cattle were trucked away.

I wonder if it was this evening's experience that caused me to pull this childhood memory forward and to re-envision the movement and the crush of the cattle in the labyrinth of pens and alleyways. Tonight my husband and I attended our first "Meet the Staff Night" as parents.

We went early to the school, having been told by our neighbor that if we wanted to get seats in the gym for the principal's welcome, we needed to be at the school at least half an hour early. As we walked across the field together, I observed the surge of parents coming from all over the neighborhood. Cars lined the streets surrounding the school; the parking lot was already becoming full and congested. Entrances throughout the school were open and parents streamed into the building. The school hallways were crowded and noisy as parents called greetings to one another or joined together on their way to the gym. As parents new to the school, we found ourselves falling in with the crowd, rushing toward a destination that seemed to be collectively understood.

Inside, gymnasium chairs were stretched from wall to wall, lining the large room from front to back. Already the room was half-filled and parents continued to flow in from both doorways. Gazing around the room, I noticed only a few parents held small children or infants in their arms or had them resting on their laps. While the atmosphere felt charged as it does just prior to a Christmas concert, the absence of children, and of video cameras and decorations, signalled a different event.

The crowd of parents settled and fell silent as the principal stepped to the microphone. It was Hanna's first year at the school and parents were interested in hearing her words. They listened as she introduced the staff, most of whom it seemed were familiar to them. Hanna spoke to parents of her experiences, both as a parent and as an educator. She shared her beliefs about teaching and learning and about how she had come to those beliefs. Hanna's words were warm and sincere.

Hanna then explained how the rest of the evening was organized. There would be two half-hour sessions for parents in classrooms. Parents were invited to move to one of their children's classrooms to listen to the teacher's presentation regarding curriculum and programming and to ask questions. After half an hour, Hanna would announce it was time to change and then parents could move to a second child's classroom for a session with that teacher. Hanna let parents know she would be in the open library area just outside her office if parents wanted to speak with her.

The entire gymnasium, filled with parents, began to empty at once. Parents with one child hurried to get into their child's classroom for the teacher's first session because they could then avoid a half-hour waiting time. Parents with two children hurried to get into a session because they couldn't afford to miss a block. Parents with three or more children? Well, they had a dilemma. Whatever their situation, parents felt a need to get out of the gym and into a classroom. The crowd pressed through the doorways and the hallways with a sense of urgency and single-minded purpose. The spaces were crowded and close, bodies bumping up against one another.

In the session in Cohen's kindergarten, the teacher stood at one end of the cozy corner. Because, I believe, she wanted parents to see the physical organization of the classroom as it is when the children are there working, there were no chairs set up for parents or places to sit other than at learning centres. Parents either stood in any unused spaces, leaned against walls or shelves, or sat on the carpet in the cozy corner. While she warmly invited us in, there was a sense of awkwardness, of really not knowing where to be or what to do. She gave us a handout containing her beliefs about kindergarten, and including information about the program and about expectations for children, which she talked through. I liked the things she had to say. There were just a couple of minutes for questions before the announcement was made that it was time to move on. Again the crowd surged out into the hallways, pushing to get into a second classroom or into an entrance way to make their way out of the school.

Walking home, I was filled with a sense of emptiness. We had been rushed in, we had been rushed out. There was no coffee, no time for conversation, no invitation to linger. The feeling throughout was one of time and of pressure; the clock presided over the evening like a cattleman with a stock whip. We moved through the entrances and hallways, into the gym and classrooms, in the same kind of blind crush that cattle move into and out of the sales ring. As we walked home, I wondered if we moved with purpose and intention or if we followed a cattle path trodden before us. I wondered if we brought our questions, our wonders, our hopes for our children's education or if we just responded to the prodding of the cattlemen. I wondered how often, as parents, will we be herded through the alleyways of schooling; how often will we be heard?

Emerging Images of Parent Involvement

Thinking back to the photos of me with my son's class, sitting on the carpet during circle time, scooping jello into baggies for a color mixing activity, hiking at Elk Island National Park, I note I have fulfilled many of the roles traditional to being a parent volunteer. At the elementary school level, parents typically laminate, photocopy, fund raise, attend field trips, help in classrooms, read with children, work with individual students or small groups of children. McGilp and Michael (1994) categorize these kinds of parent involvement as "audience, spectators, fund raisers, aides and organizers" (p. 2). That it is the role of parents to carry out the tasks the staff determine to be needed is the common story being lived in schools. Whenever I have gone to help in my son's classroom, I have begun by asking Cohen's teacher what she would like me to do. Whenever given a choice of task, I consistently responded by asking her what would help her the most. The story of parent involvement is a well-known and well-rehearsed story. Both teachers and parents assume their character roles easily and continue to relive the same plot line.

In the characterization of teachers and parents within this plot line, I often hear teachers being cast as the protagonists, the principal performers who advocate for conditions which support and encourage the learning and development of their students. I often hear parents cast as antagonists, being seen as doing, or not doing, things which interfere with the quest of the protagonist to enhance learning. Parents most certain to be cast as antagonists are those who do not meet the white, middle-class values and expectations of the school system (McCaleb, 1994). In such a characterization, emphasis is placed on the education of parents. Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez and Bloom (1993) see these education programs falling into four types: family support, parent education (relating to the school), parenthood education (relating to the home) and parent involvement/parent participation.

The first type, family support programs, generally includes nutrition, health care and social services components. "These programs recognize that for many families the first step toward improving home conditions for children's cognitive development is to meet the family's basic physical, economic, and social needs" (Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez & Bloom, 1993, p. 85). While I have not lived the story of family support programs in my position as parent, I lived that story as a teacher and a principal. I remember calling child welfare when I learned that Stephanie's mom had not come home the night before. As an eight year old, Stephanie was alone until 11:00 p.m. until she was finally so worried about her mom's whereabouts and safety that she went to her neighbors to get help. I remember making calls to social and community agencies to get winter clothing for Scott and his sister Corrine who were coming to school in the winter wearing spring jackets and bare feet in rubber boots. I remember working with a case worker to ensure that six year old Melanie had something to eat before coming to school and something besides dry noodles for lunch. The children and the situations may be different in the stories being lived at my son's school but it is certain that family support is being provided.

Parent education programs, the second type outlined by Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez and Bloom, "concentrate on the role of parents as partners in their children's education and attempt to alter some aspect of parental knowledge, attitudes, or behaviours, with a view to improving children's cognitive and school performance" (p. 85). At Cohen's school, a session on literacy offered for parents of kindergarten and year one students falls into this story line. In this session, a district reading specialist spoke to parents about such things as reading to their children everyday, about engaging in open-ended conversation, and about creating an awareness of environmental print.

The third category, parenthood education, "is designed to help parents or prospective parents learn about child rearing and child development principles" (p. 85). A session on student behavior held at a monthly school council meeting at Cohen's school fits within this third story line. Once again, a district consultant was asked to come and speak to parents. In this session, the focus was on the beliefs and premises on which behavioral management strategies are based.

The fourth type, parent involvement and parent participation programs "tend to be directed by the school and attempt to involve parents in school activities and/or teach parents specific skills and strategies for teaching or reinforcing school tasks at home" (Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez & Bloom, 1993, p. 85). The session I attended at Cohen's school on study skills is an example of this fourth story line. As part of a school council meeting, two of the teaching staff spoke about the use of an agenda book, the creation of an environment conducive to doing homework, and the organization of time and materials.

All of these activities tell a story of how, within parent education, parents are being positioned off the landscape of schools—their presence seemingly invisible in the narratives being composed. In and of themselves, the activities described are good activities with good intentions. What is interesting to ask, though, is whose agenda is being served and why. In each instance, the purpose of the agenda was to further the school's mission to enhance student learning. In each instance, the service or the session was delivered by school personnel or professionals in a support field. I wonder about the assumptions that underlie an agenda which is unidirectional in its intentions.

In reflecting upon a comprehensive parent involvement framework developed by Epstein (1995), it appears that her work perpetuates the same story. Epstein outlines six types of parental involvement which reflect the roles McGilp and Michael identify as well as the parenting focus emphasized by Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez and Bloom. She describes the six roles parents play as parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community (Epstein, 1995, p. 15).

Returning to the photo album of my life's moments and memories, I search for photos which tell of my experiences as a parent involved with my son's schooling. Had photos been taken at the student behavior session, you would see me in the audience and within a small group of parents talking about the premises of behavior which the consultant shared with us, an attendee at a parenting workshop. It is easy to find photos of me engaged in activities of communication with Cohen's school. I hope I created some strong images of communicating in the stories of Cohen's first day of kindergarten, of the parent meeting with the kindergarten aide that morning, of my first Meet the Staff Night. I could create other images through telling stories of participating in Cohen's student-led conferences, of reading his class newsletters, or of reading his school newsletter. I've already shared some images of volunteering. Do you remember the photo of me during circle time in the kindergarten? How about the one where I was scooping jello into baggies for the color mixing activity? I'm sure you'll remember the photo taken of me hiking with Cohen and his classmates at Elk Island Park. Had photos been taken of the study skills session for parents, you would see me among the parents, seated at round tables in the library, listening to how we could enhance children's learning at home. When I shared earlier photos, some showed my involvement as a parent in what Epstein refers to as decision making roles. The photo of me involved in discussion at a school council meeting, or cooking hotdogs at a school council initiated family barbecue, give you glimpses of my school council involvement. Finding pictures of collaborating with the community is harder. I wonder if arranging for Parks and Recreation to lead activities at our school's family barbecue would fall into this role. I wonder if setting up the science demonstrations we incorporated into that family evening, which led to an after school science program in our community, would fall into this role. The intention, through Epstein's model of parent involvement, is to forge strong school/family/community partnerships. I am struck by the fact that I am involved in most, if not all, of the parent involvement roles she outlines, and yet I am not feeling like a partner with the school. I am still positioned off the landscape of schooling.

Benson's work affirms my feelings of being positioned off the landscape of schooling as a parent. Benson (1998) focused on recording and emphasizing the personal knowledge and voice of parents regarding the school system. She writes,

> As the stories were collected the picture of "how it is for parents" became

> clearer. The education ministry rhetoric of "parents as partners" was generally not what was being played out at the school level. Or as stated by Lewington and Orpwood (1995); "Partnership is the overworked word of the day, as education leaders attempt to demonstrate their willingness to move beyond the historic divide of 'them' and 'us' that separates parents and teachers. But in the experience of some parents, the paradox of education is that, in practice, the system is resistant as ever to building real bridges to the outside world" (p. 4). (Benson, 1998, p. 6)

When I first read Epstein's work, which focuses on building bridges to the outside world, I was encouraged by her attention to families. I hoped that such attention to families signalled an exploration of partnerships. Yet, I saw the typical partnership being preserved.

> The way schools care about children is reflected in the way schools care about the children's families. If educators view children simply as *students*, they are likely to see the family as separate from the school. That is, the family is expected to do its job and leave the education of children to the schools. If educators view students as *children*, they are likely to see both the family and the community as partners with the school in children's education and development. Partners recognize their shared interests in and responsibilities for children, and they work together to create better programs and opportunities for students. (Epstein, 1995, p. 11)

Educators at Cohen's school do not believe I should leave his education to them. I am asked to home read with him, to practice spelling words and math facts, to sign his agenda book each day, to assist with homework assignments, to volunteer. His school's belief statement speaks of our shared responsibility. I believe my involvement enhances Cohen's opportunities for learning. I do not believe these roles make me a partner with Cohen's school. I do not believe these roles position me on the landscape of Cohen's school. The agenda is set by the school and I serve that agenda. I receive information from the school about Cohen and his program; I am rarely asked to give information. What I know as Cohen's mom, and how the school could learn from what I know, is not a recognized part of the agenda. Cohen is positioned on the landscape of schooling, outside of his family.

In Epstein's model, in all of the models reflected in the work of McGilp and Michael and Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez and Bloom, and in the ways parents are asked to work within schools, knowledge, voice and decision-making rest with the educators. The parents' role is to support the schools in realizing their goal of improved student achievement through the positive parenting they do at home, through their home support of and assistance with their children's schoolwork, and through the volunteer work they do at school. The schools' view seems to be one of "seek[ing] to determine what parents can do for teachers, rather than what schools can do for families" (Cairney & Munsie, 1992, p. 5).

School Councils: A New Image of Parent Involvement

It would seem legislative changes made in the province of Alberta in 1995, which resulted in the establishment of school councils, would have given parents a role with more voice and decision-making and would have recognized parent knowledge.

> School Councils have been established as collective associations of parents, teachers, principals, staff, students and community representatives who seek to work together to promote the well-being and effectiveness of the entire school community and thereby to enhance student learning. A school council is a means to facilitate cooperation among all the concerned participants in the local school. (Alberta Education, 1995, p. 1)

In my three year experience as an executive member of my son's school council, I found the story of parent involvement being lived an unchanged story. Our conversations often focused on topics outside of student programming, such as school t-shirts, photographers, or student agenda books. Lynn, an Ontario parent in Benson's study, shares, "We cannot make any improvements to our curriculum when we do not believe in the same qualities for education. My Principal told me that "hot dogs" (meaning helping with hot dog day lunches) were curriculum" (Benson, 1998, p. 11). Although disguised in a language of support, Benson (1998) discovered that

> "The Advocacy Project" (BCCPAC, 1995), describes a similar frustration felt by many parents in British Columbia. "Some (parents) expressed frustration that their parent advisory council (PAC) was told by the school administration it could not discuss the delivery of service to students because such topics could lead to the discussion of staff. These PAC's felt they were left little room for the discussion of anything but fund-raising, social events, and plumbing" (p. 18). (p. 11)

Looking Beyond the Images

From these stories and photos, I am sure you are developing a sense of some unstated assumptions inherent in the ways parents are involved in schooling; assumptions about roles, responsibility, power and control. Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez and Bloom (1993) believe that a prevalent assumption held in education prior to the 1970's was school culture and environment were superior to home culture and environment in situations where schools were located in other than white middle-class communities. They believe there was a transition from this "deficit model" to a "cultural difference model" in which it was recognized the school environment and culture were different from the home, but not superior to it. I wonder how these two models are lived in current practice.

Cairney and Munsie (1992) express concern about the following myths held in relation to parent involvement: some parents are not interested in their children's education; middle-class parents are better parents; it is difficult to get parents involved; you only get the parents you do not need to see; parents do not have the expertise needed to facilitate their children's learning. These myths address the deficit and cultural difference models as well as highlight other assumptions. When parents are not engaged in schooling activities, the assumption is the fault rests with the parent rather than with the way the school invites involvement. Believing there are some parents which schools do not need to see is based on an assumption that a partnership is only needed with those parents who are not conforming to the school's agenda rather than with all parents. Believing parents do not have the skills to assist their children's learning assumes parents' ways of knowing are of lesser value than the expert or professionally-trained ways of knowing. Two main assumptions in many schools seem to prevail: "parents have only a limited responsibility in relation to their children as learners[, and]...the school is the site of the 'main game' " (Cairney & Munsie, 1992, p. 1).

Creating New Images

If these are the stories about parents that live on the landscape of schools, how do we begin to change these stories? I wonder how a new story, in which roles, responsibility, power and control are shared by parents, educators and students, could be imagined to replace the current story through which parent involvement is being lived. Writers such as Cairney and Munsie (1992) see the following changes as necessary.

> In a sense it does not matter how you involve parents as long as the following points are observed:
>
> 1 Parents must not be involved simply to fulfil the school's purposes.
>
> 2 The starting point for parent programs must be a sense of partnership, of accepting that each has much to learn from the other.
>
> 3 The overriding purpose must be to bring about positive...benefits for children.
>
> 4 All strategies must consider the needs of parents.
>
> 5 All initiatives should lead parents to assume greater involvement in their children's learning.
>
> 6 Wherever possible, parent expertise and knowledge should be used.
>
> (Cairney & Munsie, 1992, p. 34)

I wonder what the landscape of schools would look like if there was a shift in power and control. I wonder what the stories on the landscape would look like if the threads of rights, equality, reciprocity and empowerment (Wolfendale, 1992, p. 2) were written into the plot lines.

Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez and Bloom (1993) add to this list of premises through their description of the five beliefs on which a program entitled Family Matters Project (Cochran & Dean, 1991; Cochran & Woolever, 1983) is based.

> First, all families have strengths and these, rather than deficits, should be emphasized. Second, useful knowledge about child rearing resides in parents, communities, and social networks, not just in experts. Third, different family forms are legitimate and can promote healthy children and healthy adults. Fourth, fathers should be integrally involved. And fifth, cultural differences are both valid and valuable. (p. 94)

Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez and Bloom (1993), like Cairney and Munsie, are proponents of a new story of partnership, what they call an "empowerment model." In referencing the work of Bastiani and Pugh and De'Ath, they describe the empowerment model as one in which "the roles of teacher and parent are equal and complementary, sharing the same purpose and characterized by mutual respect, information sharing and decision making" (p. 92).

Reading the work of other researchers who are also attempting to imagine new stories of possibility for parents on school landscapes brings to my mind the images in a wordless children's book entitled Three Cats (Brouillard, 1992). The story begins with a picture of three cats sitting on a branch. Down below, three fish are swimming in the water. As the fish dart and jump, rising above the water's surface, the cats begin to show interest. Before you know it, one cat has leaned far over the branch and then plunged into the water. The other two cats soon follow suit and the pool becomes a bubbling, splashing spectacle. Out of this scene, rise the three fish. The cats are now madly swimming in the water. When the story ends, the three fish are perched on the tree branch. When I speak of parents having roles which are equal and complementary to those of teachers, I am not telling a cat and fish story. We all know that cats will not do well in the pool and fish will not survive on the branch. Just as I believe in parent knowledge, I believe in teacher knowledge. I am not advocating a replacement, or downplaying, of teacher expertise. What interests me is exploring possibilities for positioning parents on the landscape of schools where their knowledge and stories can be laid beside those of teachers.

Images of Parents Positioned on the Landscape of Schools

Thinking about parents on school landscapes reminded me of a story told by my friend Sue. Here's a picture of her standing in front of my house. We try and go for a run or a walk three or four nights a week through the spring and summer—this time together is so important to both of us. While the exercise is great, it is the conversation that keeps us going out evening after evening. Sue is a parent too, with her oldest child in school. We talk a lot about our kids and about our parenting.

I remember one warm evening in May. She said she looked forward to our run all day because she had so much to tell me. As we headed down the block, Sue began to tell of a school council meeting the night before. Sue chairs the school council so I had listened to many school council stories before. This one was different. Here is her story as I remember Sue telling it.[2]

Class Placements: Sue's Thoughts, Images, Memories

> It was close to 10:00 p.m. when I arrived home from the school council meeting. I was feeling both exhausted and exhilarated, much like at the end of a good run when my body is completely drained but my mind is still running, relishing the accomplishment of a challenging undertaking. Our conversation at the meeting had been long and intense. There had been sensitive issues which touched our beliefs and our emotions. There had been challenges to overcome. Although there were many moments which were not comfortable or easy, we worked the issues through. We had arrived at a place, together, that we all felt good about.
>
> All seven executive members of school council were present at the meeting. Casually seated around the table in Judi's office, we poured coffee and chatted informally as we got ready to begin the meeting. Right away, it was apparent that Judi, our principal,

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[2] A different font is used to distinguish Sue's stories from my own

had something on her mind. Usually so full of laughter and spirited energy, she seemed tense and distracted. As we listed agenda items on the whiteboard, Judi asked that we discuss the process for the placement of children into classes. Because our family is new to the school this year, this was an item for which I had no history. From the looks which crossed the faces of other parents in the room and from the glances they exchanged, I could tell this was an item of significance.

Judi began very tentatively and cautiously. Both her voice and her hands shook slightly as she shared her observations. As a new principal in the school this year, she had concerns about the variance she saw in classes. Some classes were much bigger than others, some classes had a disproportionate number of boys and girls, some classes were unbalanced in regard to the range of student performance within them. Judi tried to paint a picture for us of how this variance caused problems within the school. She spoke with intense caring about the effect on the teaching and learning environments in some classrooms, of how it resulted in behavioral issues, of how kids' opportunities for learning were affected. She was not only observing these effects herself, but she was hearing concerns from students, parents and staff. Judi placed our school's newly completed belief statement on the table, a statement developed by parents and staff, and read aloud the line, "We are responsible for the collective success of our children." She said the statement acknowledged a shared belief and she asked us to work with her and the staff to figure out a new class placement process equitable for all students.

Not knowing how class placements had been made the previous year, I asked Judi to describe the process. With the help of Marg, the teacher representative on school council, Judi recounted the history of the school's class placement process. Apparently, over a number of years, parent requests for specific teachers for their children had increased. Initially, such requests were considered by the principal. Then, as parents saw that some requests for teachers were being made and being granted, more and more requests from parents came in. Eventually the situation evolved into one in which so many requests were being made a book was kept in the office for recording all parent requests for teachers or class placements. It seemed, this past year, these requests became the primary basis for establishing class lists.

A great deal of conversation, and emotion, arose from Judi's and Marg's recounting of the evolution of the class placement process. Some of the parents admitted, with a sense of guilt, they were parents who had requested teachers. As parents told their stories, they emphasized they engaged in the process because they saw it as a legitimized process at the school; one which most parents engaged in. Their stories showed they were caring and involved parents who felt they would have disadvantaged their children if they had not participated in the request process. Marg worked to explain the dilemma the staff faced. If parent requests were not accepted at all, it seemed teachers were trying to shut parents out. If some parent requests were honored while others weren't, it seemed the staff was playing favorites or being inequitable. If all parent requests were honored, teachers could not reflect factors such as size, gender balance, and heterogeneity in their decision-making, resulting in classes which were not as thoughtfully established. Marg explained to us that teachers felt they were no longer able to use what they knew about students, and about teaching and learning in the establishment of classes. She confided that teachers felt they were caught within a popularity contest in which some of them came out winners and some of them losers. Throughout this conversation, the air in Judi's office was charged with the emotional expression of thoughts and feelings.

We sorted through some issues. As a group we acknowledged that what we wanted was what was best for all children in the school, not just best for some. We affirmed there needed to be a place for parent voice in class placement decisions. We recognized staff evaluation was the responsibility of the principal. We agreed teacher knowledge about children was important to the placement of children in classes. Our conversation took us a long way in consciously establishing these premises. We began to imagine new ways to reflect them in our practice. We asked ourselves how we could bring parent voice and teacher voice together. We wondered how parents could provide input into placement decisions without being evaluative of teachers. We thought about the factors Judi shared with us earlier that enabled the creation of heterogeneous classes and equitable teaching and learning opportunities for kids. As we tossed ideas around, we talked about whether they were practical and manageable, and whether they would be accepted by staff and by parents.

After exploring many possibilities, we arrived at a place that seemed to be comfortable for all of us. We developed a form which invited parents to share with teachers and school staff the knowledge they have of their children—what their strengths are, what their interests are, in what areas they may need support or challenge. The form would enable parents to speak about their children and to share their hopes for their children's educational program. It would enable parents' knowledge of their children to become an integral part of the information teachers would thoughtfully consider when they work together with Judi to place children into classes.

The form seemed to address other areas of concern as well. While it provided an opportunity for parent voice, it placed the focus on children rather than teachers. It gave parents the chance to share their knowledge of their children rather than engage in selecting a teacher. This process left the responsibility for the evaluation of staff to Judi and respected teachers' feelings of concern about being caught in a popularity contest. It seemed to be a process which honored children, staff and parents.

We sat around Judi's table, excited about the possibilities which this new class placement process offered all members of our school community. The exuberance which was generally characteristic of Judi resurfaced. She was relaxed and at ease once more, exchanging comments and sharing laughs as we completed our agenda. Marg

> was enthused and eager to present the plan to teachers at the next staff meeting, convinced that they'd be pleased with how it honored everyone within our school community. Parents, too, were ready to speak for the proposed class placement process to other parents in attendance at our next school council town hall meeting. As we left the school last evening, we left united by the plan we were able to develop.

Emerging Images of School Reform

Sue's story is encouraging! It caused me to wonder if parents' positioning can be shifted from the margins onto the landscape of schools. As I think about Sue's experience, I wonder what caused a change in the way parents were positioned within her school. I wonder what created a place for parent voice and knowledge in such critical decision-making.

The current focus in school reform places an emphasis on the individual (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991; Fullan, 1997; Darling-Hammond, 1993, 1995; Hollingsworth & Sockett, 1994; Lieberman, 1992, 1995). Fullan (1997) believes that school reform failed in the past because it "either ignored principals and teachers or oversimplified what they do" (p. xiii). He concluded that the only way to improve education is "through the day-to-day actions of empowered individuals" (p. 47).

Was it the actions of an empowered principal that enabled shifts in the class placement process at Sue's school? Judi did not accept the process established by the prior principal nor did she determine a new process on her own. She facilitated a situation in which parent voice and teacher voice came together, although the potential for difference of opinion, or even conflict, existed. She ensured the conversation at the school council meeting centered on beliefs, rather than on vested interests. She consciously worked to create an environment of possibilities, rather than one of blame.

Fullan believes the greater external and internal complexity of principals' work in schools is creating a "greater need for building relationships in situations of diversity and conflict," a greater need for "fighting against systems that foster dependency" and a greater need for "reflection and proaction" (Fullan, 1997, p. 24). In describing this complexity, he writes,

> Evans (1996) notes there have always been chronic tensions in leadership: between managing and leading; between resources and demands; between being a leader but being dependent on others; and between being isolated but in a fishbowl. What is new, Evans observes, is the 'extent and intensity'… (p. 152). (Fullan, 1997, p. 2)

Sue described Judi's demeanor at the school council meeting as feeling these tensions. Judi's intent was to facilitate a process in which the human resources of parents and staff were both capitalized upon, yet the process was obviously dependent upon the reactions and feelings of both parents and the teacher representative. Judi seemed aware that the way in which relationships were honored and in which differences were resolved would be critical to a resolution. I am sure Judi was conscious of how, in the end, the responsibility for the decision about class placements would ultimately rest with her. I am sure she recognized that how she handled that decision, as a principal new to the school, would influence the level of support and acceptance she received, and the school received, from the parent community. Judi's actions as an individual, as an empowered principal, although fraught with tension, contributed to a change in the way class placements were being made, and, ultimately, to how parents were positioned on the landscape of her school.

I wonder if it was the actions of an empowered teacher that enabled shifts in the class placement process at Sue's school. Marg, too, shared the school's stated belief in the collective success of all students. Throughout the conversation, she drew on this belief in reflecting on the stories parents told and on the stories she told of teachers. Sue's story gave me a sense that Marg, in sharing how teachers felt caught in a popularity contest, was trying to build a new level of trust and openness in relations with parents. Marg engaged collaboratively with parents in the search for new processes for placing children in classes.

Fullan and Hargreaves advocate for interactive professionalism, a "redefining [of] the role of teachers and the conditions in which they work" (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1991, p. 63). Within this redefinition, teacher judgment, collaboration, growth, reflection and expertise are emphasized. All of these qualities Marg displayed in her work with parents and with Judi on the class placement process. She seemed to use her teacher judgment in deciding what stories to share, and how, and when. She collaborated with others in imagining new possibilities for class placements. Her sense of reflectiveness was apparent in the way she thought about current and prospective practices in light of beliefs. She utilized her knowledge of the criteria used in placing children in classes, of children, and of teachers throughout the planning process.

Darling-Hammond (1993) affirms how complex "interactive professionalism" is, stating that every day teachers "must adapt and respond on the basis of individual needs and interactions to a complex, ever-changing set of circumstances—taking into account the real knowledge and experiences of learners, including their cultures, their communities, and the conditions in which they live" (p. 758). At the school council meeting, the 'learners' with whom Marg worked were parents and the knowledge and experiences she took into account were parent knowledge and stories of experience. Marg's actions as an individual, as an empowered teacher, contributed to a change in the way class placements were being made, and, ultimately, to how parents were positioned on the landscape of her school.

Both Judi and Marg participated in writing a new story of parent involvement. The stories they lived were not stories of power and authority, stories which set them above or apart from parents on the school council. Instead, they lived stories of shared voice and responsibility. Looking back to the new educative and philosophic premises we talked about earlier (Cairney & Munsie, 1992), this new story did honor and provide a place for parent knowledge, it fulfilled parents' purposes as well as the school's, and it enabled both parents and educators to learn from each other. This story moved the parents of Sue's school from the margins onto the school landscape.

Images of Changing the School Landscape

There are more photos of Sue taken two years after the photo you saw of her in running gear outside my house. How can I remember so exactly? Well, it's because of the memories I associate with the photographs; it's because of the stories they evoke. Sue and her kids went out to Michelon Lake to camp as soon as school got out. During that first week of summer vacation, the boys and I made a day trip to join them. The weather was wonderful and we had a great day. What I remember most though was how upset Sue was about a decision made at her children's school in June. We did a lot of talking about that decision as Sue worked to make sense of it. Here is the story she told me.

Reliving the Class Placement Story: Sue's Thoughts, Images, Memories

Going through Tobin's backpack one day after school, I was struck by the number of notices: notices regarding his year-end fieldtrip, sports day, and the final school assembly. The arrival of June was being announced through each and every one of them. Suddenly realizing the little bit of time left to the school year, I began to mentally review my 'To Do' list as chair of the school council. One thing which came to mind was the parent input form regarding our children's class placements for next year. As a school council executive, we had not talked with Darryl, our new school principal, about this form. I began to wonder what he knew about the form or had been told about the process. I wished we had scheduled a school council meeting, regardless of how busy we all were. As a school community, we had some history with class placements that it was important for Darryl to understand. I wrote myself a note of reminder to go in and see Darryl, I laid it by the phone and turned my attention to the permission slips I needed to sign for Tobin.

Walking past Tobin's backpack later that evening, sitting ready at the back door, I was reminded of the conversation I wanted to have with Darryl the next day. There was a lot for Darryl to know, not just about the class placement practices of the last principal but also the one before her. There was also a lot to know, not about the class placement form itself, but about the talking and thinking that led to this form being created. It was not the form itself that was important but what the form represented: the sense of shared responsibility between teachers and parents and the sense of shared voice.

I felt certain he would see value in the form and the process behind it. In numerous conversations this year, Darryl looked at issues both as a principal and as a parent. He often shared anecdotes and stories about his own grown children. I thought he would readily understand the voice we were trying to give parents with the design of the form and its use in the class placement process.

When I got to school the next morning, Joan, the school secretary, told me that Darryl was busy with children for a few minutes. When Darryl's door opened, Danna and Connor and I all trooped in to talk to him. Danna and Connor picked up whiteboard markers and began drawing while Darryl and I talked. As I let Darryl know where I was at with all of my school council tasks, he grabbed a school newsletter from the top of a big box sitting on his table and opened it to show me what he had included on school organization for the upcoming year. Within his "Principal's Message" he outlined the organizational plan for each grade level for the next school year and he wrote an item entitled, "Class Lists." As he quickly skimmed through this item with me, I stood in shocked silence. It went against everything we developed as a school council two years ago. I felt angry and betrayed! Just then, students arrived at Darryl's office door because he was filling the role of 'reader' for one of the provincial achievement exams. As Danna and Connor erased the board and I gathered their things, I told Darryl I would read Tobin's newsletter in detail when he brought it home that afternoon and then I would call and make an appointment to talk with him further. I sensed my lack of response gave Darryl an indication of my initial reaction to the decisions which had been made about the development of class lists.

On my way home, I could not believe what I had read. I kept thinking I must have missed something! I remember thinking that Darryl wouldn't remove parents from the class placement process, that Darryl wouldn't make a decision this big without discussing it with the school council. Both as a parent, and as chair of the school council, I felt silenced.

When Tobin came home after school, we emptied his backpack. The school newsletter sat on the table in front of me, its bright golden cover glaring out the Principal's Message. It's funny, you know, because when I visualize Darryl, I picture him with a smile on his face. Yet that message he had written was a message with a glare!

You know, Deb, I bet the cover of the newsletter is still in my purse. I stuck it in there when I went to meet with him about his message. Ya, here it is. Read this!

> **CLASS LISTS:**
>
> The staff are working to create the class lists for the new school year. To develop these lists the teachers are considering many factors such as: balance of boys and girls, range of abilities and behaviors, learning styles and personalities, special needs programming considerations, group dynamics, supportive peer groups and class size. Consideration of all these factors will enable us to address the needs of the group as well as the individuals within that group. The teachers currently working with the students along with next year's teachers are developing the new class lists. We believe this process is the best way of ensuring successful learning groups for the students at [Edgewood].
>
> If we feel in certain circumstances that we require additional information to make a successful placement we will contact the parents of those students. **Please do not make specific requests for placement of your child.** Tentative class lists will be posted at the front entrance on June 29 (afternoon).

Deb, I sat in disbelief as I read and reread this item. I couldn't believe I was understanding it correctly. I couldn't believe it was really saying staff, without any input from parents, would create the class lists. I couldn't accept that staff truly believe this is "the best way." Questions screamed out: What about what parents believe is "the best way"? What about the school's belief statement which says, "...we believe in the shared responsibility of parents, staff, students and community to maximize learning and growth for students"? I wondered if, as parents, we only get to share responsibility when the school determines it's okay for us to do so. I wondered why it is that we can share responsibility when it comes to photocopying, laminating, supervising field trips or choosing the school photographer but when it comes to the placement of our children in classes, curriculum delivery or allocation of resources, responsibilities which truly affect teaching and learning, we no longer have a shared place. The bold print directing parents not to make specific requests served to emphasize just where our place as parents was. I had to ask myself what had happened to the work we had done with Judi.

Throughout the rest of that afternoon and evening I observed and listened closely to the things my three kids were saying and doing. As we had dinner, as we played Snakes and Ladders, as I bathed them and read them stories, I was aware of the ways I know them which are different than the ways any other person knows them. They can be emotional and vulnerable at home, they can share their endless and unfolding discoveries, they can be silly and outrageous, they can express their concerns and fears in a different way than they will anywhere else. Their teachers will never see or know this part of them—not unless I have an opportunity to share it with them.

I made an appointment to meet with Darryl the next day. I took Tobin back to school after lunch and, once again, Danna, Connor and I went to talk with Darryl. Once the kids were settled, Darryl and I sat down together at his round table.

I told him I was disappointed with the decision made about class lists. Darryl responded by admitting he knew the decision would cause some concern with parents. When I asked him why, then, he went ahead without discussing it with school council, he said he had talked it through with one parent member of the school council who happened to be in the school. She understood and accepted his reasons for changing the process. When I expressed my concern about a decision this big being made without school council involvement, Darryl said it wasn't that he was intending to leave anyone out but he was pressed for time. The staff wanted to begin work on class lists right away and there just wasn't time to get the form out and back quickly enough.

When I questioned whether developing class lists early was more important than including parents in the process, Darryl alluded to some problems with the class placement forms. I asked him to elaborate on concerns the staff had because, as a school council, we had been told the forms were working well. Darryl shared that although the forms were designed for parents to provide information about their children, some parents did make comments about the teacher their child currently had or about prospective teachers for the upcoming school year.

I said I was not surprised by that because a change in thinking takes time. For a number of years, it had been acceptable at Edgewood to request a specific teacher. Making the transition from focussing on teachers to focussing on children was going to take some time.

Darryl acknowledged it does take time to change practices but said the real problem arose because forms on which parents made specific comments about teachers were pulled out by Judi to avoid teachers seeing the comments made about their colleagues or themselves. The result of pulling some forms, Darryl insisted, was that incomplete parent input went forward to teachers. Further, he confided that some teachers told him they did not use the forms anyway. He would rather be honest with parents by telling them teachers were making the class lists than by having them believe they were providing input when really they weren't.

I was frustrated by his response! If there were problems with the form or the process, why were we not made aware of them? If teachers had concerns about how cumbersome the information was to use, why hadn't we been told that? Why was it okay for a process, developed by both staff and parents, to be thrown out by staff? Why was it okay to just throw out the process without trying to adjust it and make it work? Darryl continued to respond to all my questions, coming to recognize after a lengthy debate that my concern was not with the specifics of the class placement process but with what the process symbolized, and with what taking the process away symbolized.

By this time we had been engaged in intense conversation for over an hour. Connor had climbed up on my lap and fallen asleep. Danna was playing with toys under my chair, frequently asking me if it was time to go yet. Recognizing that we were not going to get to a place of mutual understanding, I said I needed to get my kids home for their nap. Darryl was anxious that I not leave upset about his decision so, while Danna gathered up toys and books and put them away, he continued the conversation.

Darryl shared that he talked with a number of his principal colleagues about class placements and found there was a range of practices in place, from honoring parent requests to establishing classes solely by staff. I acknowledged I was aware of the range but what was significant to me was not whether other schools engaged in the same processes as ours but in how our school determined our practice.

Again stating that I had to go, I walked to my van carrying Connor and holding Danna's hand. Darryl walked with me, carrying the kids' backpack, still trying to ease my concern about the exclusion of parents from the class placement process. As I buckled the kids in their carseats, Darryl reflected aloud on our conversation. As we parted he said that maybe, through all of this, we would learn that it was better if teachers made up the class lists.

I still can not believe Darryl's lack of understanding of how it felt to be a parent in this situation. I feel such disappointment every time I think about my meeting with Darryl or tell this story.

Zooming in on School Reform: Looking Beyond the Images

Hearing Sue's story, seeing how deflated she was by the turn of events at her children's school, feeling the frustration and disillusionment in her words, I realized how tentative the positioning of parents is on the landscape of schools. While Judi had made a place for parents, Darryl took that place away. Pinning our hopes on the individual to bring about school reform is not the answer that Fullan (1997) was hoping to find. To create real change in the positioning of parents, to create lasting change, we need to turn again to the professional knowledge landscapes of schools.

I think back to my appointment as principal of Julia Kiniski School. I remember my first visit to the school, driving up to the beautiful brick building, admiring the bell tower and the curved wall of glass blocks along the front entranceway. As I toured the building that day with the prior principal, it was the building I saw—the cozy corners, the skylights, the neon clock—not the life of the building. It was not until much later, when I'd lived in the building, with children, staff and parents, through lessons, assemblies, school wide events and transitions, that I came to 'know' the building. It was then that I understood the narrative history of the building (Clandinin & Connelly, 1988). It was then that I understood the narrative histories of the teachers, and many of the parents and students. It was then that I understood how much these histories were tied together, one with the other, and with both the present and the future (Clandinin & Connelly, 1988).

One day Lauren, a teacher who had joined the staff in the school's fifth year of operation, asked if she could move a photograph of Julia Kiniski, the woman after whom the school was named, in order to create a display of children's work. What seemed like a straightforward request to Lauren was met with an emotional response by other staff members who had been with the school from the time of its opening. For them, the photograph had a storied history. They began to tell stories to Lauren, to me, and to other new staff members about the school's opening ceremony at which the photo was presented. They began to tell stories of the Kiniski family and the work that Julia Kiniski did for disadvantaged children in our city. Through sharing this piece of the school's history, these staff members brought those of us who had not been at the school's opening deeper into the life of the school. They connected us more closely with them. They tied the school's present with its past and with its future.

When Darryl, in Sue's story, decided that staff should determine classes for the next school year, without the input of parents, he did the opposite. In acting without regard for the narrative history of the class placement process and the narrative histories of the parents involved, Darryl disconnected both the past and the parents from his decision. Darryl treated as static a process which was dynamic and complex.

Do you remember when we were looking at some earlier photos in my album and I explained to you how all of the images of my experiences with schooling unfold in my mind to form a map of the landscape on which I have travelled? Do you remember how that map represented not just people, places and times but all the relationships that interconnect them? As I told you about the playgrounds and school buildings, the lessons and assemblies, the beliefs and actions which marked my map, you were developing a sense of my storied history. You were also developing a sense of how storied the history of each place on my map is—and each event—and each person. You see, the professional knowledge landscape is a landscape where individuals rich with narrative histories come together with ideas, theories and policies in a place also rich with a narrative history (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). As well, these individuals come together with hopes for the future. All of this means, then, the professional knowledge landscape of schools is a landscape which is complex, historical, personal, communal, professional, intellectual and moral (Soltis, 1995).

Given the complex and multifaceted nature of the professional knowledge landscape, how then do we begin to change the landscape of schools to create an enduring position for parents? School reform efforts of the past, which focussed on the implementation of theory or policy in schools through a top down model, have failed (Hollingsworth & Sockett, 1994). I believe, as do Clandinin and Connelly (1998a), that current school reform efforts which focus on the individual, without attending to the shaping nature of the professional knowledge landscape, will also meet with limited success. As we saw in Sue's stories of Judi and Darryl, Judi's efforts to change the positioning of parents on the landscape of school were not enough to create a lasting change. It appears that the landscape of schools itself will have to be changed if parents are to be positioned integrally on it.

Emerging Images of a Parade

Clandinin and Connelly (1998b, 1999) use the metaphor of a parade to share their conceptualization of the way in which the professional knowledge landscape changes. They write:

> Each participant in the landscape, in the parade, has a particular place and a particular set of stories being lived out at any particular time. Our influence in the landscape, in the parade, is uncertain. We cannot easily anticipate how our presence, our innovations, our stories, will influence other stories. The parade proceeds whether we wish it to or not. (1998b, p. 161)

I took my children to watch the indoor Santa Claus Parade in December. Because parade organizers had put tape lines in place to define the route, we knew where the parade was going to begin and end and we were able to choose a good spot from which to view the parade. Clandinin and Connelly's metaphoric parade has no such defined route. Instead, "[g]iven a notion of the landscape as a parade, as a changing organism composed of multiple nested stories interacting and changing over time, a narrative map might be a way of getting a sense of the changing parade" (p. 161). A narrative map might be a way to "see the direction of the parade" (p. 161).

Rather than thinking about reform efforts as those imposed externally from above, Clandinin and Connelly imagine reform to be best accomplished by joining the parade and walking along with its participants. By listening to participants' stories, by telling our own, and then by interconnecting these stories, we have, as educators, an opportunity to come to know the narrative map of the parade. Then, through watching and hearing carefully, we may note moments when possibilities for new stories emerge and "when it might be possible to shift the course of a story"

(Clandinin & Connelly, 1998b, p. 161).

But what about parents in this grand parade of schooling? Where are they positioned? I see some of them lining the parade route: spectators, audience, cheerleaders. I see others tinkering with costumes and floats, working to support those in the parade and to maintain the parade's momentum. I wonder what would happen if parents were invited to join the parade. I wonder how the narrative map would change if parents walked or rode along with educators and students in the parade of schooling.

Images of Research on a School Landscape

Selecting a Research Site: Still Frames of Possibility

In a new section of my photo album, there are pictures of my research school—the building and the flow of parents, educators, and students through it, the gathering spaces, the meetings, assemblies and special events. For me, each photo brings forward a flood of remembered experiences, of stories lived and told, of connections between people, places and things. Each photo captures a moment in my research school's parade. For you, I realize the pictures tell such a small part of the story. The images are frozen, stilled. What lives at the edges of each photograph, surrounding it, is not visible. The stories the people in the photographs tell of themselves are not audible. As I continue to write and to share my photos, I will enlarge the pictures with my words, moving you beyond the frozen images to what was around them. I will paint a picture of the landscape on which they were situated and, in some instances, a sense of the narrative histories of the people, places and events.

Let me begin by telling you how I found my research school, Gardenview. In a conversation about the positioning of parents within schools, a friend told me about a school where the principal has been thinking about parent involvement, and having conversations with staff about parent involvement. It sounded full of possibility so I called the principal and arranged to meet with her. In our meeting, the principal told me she shared an article about parents from an educational journal with her staff and they discussed it during professional time. She shared with me the conversations they had as a staff about parent voice and involvement and the conversations she had with individual staff members. Walking through the school with her, seeing parents engaged with children and teachers, watching the Power Point presentation she created for 'Parent Night,' I noted practices within the school which seemed to indicate a difference in the way parents were being thought about and positioned within this school. It was a school that offered research possibilities.

Stepping into the Picture, Stepping into the Parade

In talking with the principal about the possibility of doing research in her school, I told her some of my stories of being positioned as a parent on the margins of the school landscape and of being a teacher and a principal not awake to how parents experience schooling. She told me stories too: stories of parents who were not welcomed into staffrooms, stories of parents standing with children in lineups outside of closed school doors, stories which resonated with mine. Together we discussed how my research could unfold. After I talked about my research with parents at a school council meeting and with staff during their professional time, the principal welcomed me to join the life of the school, to walk alongside parents and educators in their already moving parade, to be both observer and participant as they travel the curving, complex, unfolding route ahead of them.

Returning to the Photo Album

I'd like you to imagine, as you read my stories of the Gardenview parade, you and I are sitting together flipping through the pages of my photo album. In Chapter II, we will move back and forth through the pages, looking at many images which represent the multiplicity of who I am as researcher in this narrative inquiry. We will explore how my positioning in the Gardenview parade may have shifted it, influenced it in ways that I am aware of and in ways that I may not even know.

We will continue to 'look' through my photo album as I tell you of my inquiry into the positioning of parents in relation to the landscape of schooling. I will create 'snapshots' with my words that portray significant moments in my research experience. I will bring those images to life by surrounding them with 'memorybank movies' – by enlarging them with stories that tell what is not visible and what is not audible in the snapshots. I will then 'look beyond the images,' both the stilled and the moving, to share my wonders about how these experiences help us to think about the positioning of parents and about the landscape of schools.

CHAPTER II

THE RESEARCHER

Joining the Parade, Beginning the Research

I'm reminded of the opening of Margaret Laurence's novel, The Diviners (1974). Part One, "River of Now and Then," begins:

> The river flowed both ways. The current moved from north to south, but the wind usually came from the south, rippling the bronze-green water in the opposite direction. This apparently impossible contradiction, made apparent and possible, still fascinated Morag after the years of river watching. (p. 11)

While the current of time pushes forward, the wind of my memories pushes backward. Recalling moments and memories, recalling times and places, recalling people and events, trying to decide what photos to put in my album, which ones to set aside, what stories to tell of my research experience—of the many stories I could tell—I understand Morag's fascination with this contradiction of flow in a deeper way than before, in an embodied way. Moving back and forth in time, shifting from the living of the research experience to the storying of that experience, is where I now find myself. I value your time with me, looking at my photos, listening to my stories. There are many stories that reside within me. My telling won't be a chronological one. I'll share my stories with you as they come to mind, as they become significant to the conversation. I'll build my photo album as I retell and relive my research experiences, deciding which photographs to include as we talk together.

As I was preparing to begin my research, Garry Jones, a fellow Ph.D. student, asked me what I was planning to do when I arrived at Gardenview. Because he was beginning his research, he was interested in how I was imagining my first days. What was I going to do when I arrived? Had I structured some taped conversations? Had I talked with the principal to develop a plan? Had I created a specific plan myself for what I would do? His questions were many. In response, I told him I was going to arrive at the school, hang my coat and find a place to put my things, get a coffee and wait to see what happened. His look told me he either felt I wasn't taking his questions seriously or I really hadn't thought hard enough about that first research day. I quickly assured him that I had thought about my first research days, all my research days, and my plan was to join the parade (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998a, 1999), to follow its route, to walk alongside different parade participants—the parents, the principal, the staff—at different points in time; to march, saunter, skip and run along with the parade as it winds its way through space, place and time. He accepted the uncertainty and yet he felt the unease—just as I did—of that uncertainty. I was trusting the parade to direct me, I was trusting in the unpredictability.

Do you remember me telling you about the indoor Santa Claus Parade I took my children to? We were given a program that listed the parade participants in the order they were going to move through the mall. Yet there was so much more to the parade than what was captured in the program. While waiting for the parade to start, costumed individuals came along handing out balloons. My boys, and their friends, rubbed balloons in their hair to make static electricity and laughed as they made each other's hair stand out on their heads. They played balloon volleyball and shrieked as their balloons escaped and began to rise to the ceiling. Our friend Stephen, already the height of an adult, jumped to grab the balloons' ribbons while Teague and Quinn pleaded to be boosted up to try and catch the strings by themselves. The children attended and responded to a parade possibility that was presented to them. Was this a planned or predicted part of the parade? No. But was it a part that was significant to my children and their friends and one that would be told in their stories of the parade? I think so.

Later, the children shifted their attention from their balloons to the participants in the parade. They waved and called out to characters they recognized from fairy tales and television shows and the characters, in turn, responded by stopping to hug or pose with a child for a picture. Passing parade participants—dancers, gymnasts, clowns—paused longer to entertain us when our laughter, cheers or clapping drew them in. Other participants moved on more quickly when a preschooler pulled away shyly or when the baby beside us, overwhelmed by the noise or the surprise of the parade activity, burst into startled tears. It was a story of improvisation. The parade was filled with uncertainty. How participants would interact with spectators and how spectators would respond in turn was unknown and yet it was those very interactions that seemed to direct the parade, to alter its momentum, to shift its movement. Bateson (1994) writes of such improvisation.

> Improvisation and new learning are not private processes; they are shared with others at every age. The multiple layers of attention involved cannot safely be brushed aside or subordinated to the completion of tasks. We are called to join in a dance whose steps must be learned along the way, so it is important to attend and respond. Even in uncertainty, we are responsible for our steps. (pp. 9-10)

Hmmm, called to join in a dance—called to join in a parade. Learning along the way—attending and responding.

Once I stepped into the parade at my research school, how quickly the lessons came! My first day began as I thought it would—I entered the school, I hung my coat, I found a place for my school bag and I got a coffee. I moved from the staffroom into the general office area. Sarah, the school secretary, greeted me warmly and welcomed me to Gardenview. As I asked her about parking, supervision, the coffee fund, photocopying costs, Dleifrag, the assistant principal, emerged from his office. Dleif and I have known each other for a few years now. We first met through some professional development work I had done for the school. Surrounding that work, we shared many stories of our experiences in education: as teachers overseas, as administrators, as central services personnel. A bond formed quickly. After a warm welcome, Dleif, like Garry, asked me how I planned to spend my first day. Leaning against the counter in the office, holding my clipboard on which I had been taking notes as Sarah and I talked, I smiled at Dleif and said I just planned to blend in to whatever happened to be going on. Before I could say more, Dleif announced, "Debbie Pushor, you are unblendable!"

The significance of his statement stayed with me. It made me think about who I was, and what part I played, in the Gardenview parade. It made me think about how my presence would affect the parade. Would it change it, shift it, alter it? If I was unblendable, as Dleif believed, the answer was going to be yes. But then I came to realize, blendable or unblendable, my very presence was going to shift the parade.

I joined Gardenview's parade as a participant observer—as someone who intended to live inside the situation, to become a part of it, and as someone who intended to step outside the parade at times, to think about what I was experiencing and to write about it. As an "insider" (Spradley, 1980), I became a part of the life of the school, a part of the parade part-time from October, 1998 through March, 1999 and full-time from April through September, 1999. As a 'member' of the staff, I participated in staff meetings, P.D. sessions, socials and celebrations. I ate my lunch and had coffee with the staff in the staffroom. I wiped tables, did dishes, shared baking from home and helped set up and clean up special events. As a 'member' of the parent community, I attended the school council meetings, helped count money and serve food on hot lunch days, had lunch and coffee with parents at school and in their homes. I was present at parent nights, student-led conferences, concerts and assemblies. I worked in the school's secret garden. As an "outsider" (Spradley, 1980) to the parade, I carried my notebook with me all the time, writing observations and reflections whenever I could, taking notes at the meetings, recording key details during special events, jotting down things I was reminded of—possibly an experience of my own, something I had read—or things I wanted to think more about. One day, as I was sitting in the staffroom making some notes just after morning recess, Sarah and Evelyn, the school principal, came in to have a coffee. As Sarah sat down with her coffee, she smiled at me and commented, "You remind me of an efficiency expert, always taking notes" (field notes, June 22, 1999). Sarah's comment speaks to my shifting stance as participant observer, sometimes more a participant in the parade, sometimes more an observer of it.

Spradley (1980) notes that the "insider/outsider experience" is not always simultaneous (p. 57). As researchers, we are not always both insider and outsider, or both to the same degree, at the same time. Bateson (1994) affirms this:

> Anthropologists are trained to be participants and observers at the same time, but the balance fluctuates. Sometimes a dissonance will break through and pull you into intense involvement in an experience you had distanced by thinking of yourself as coolly looking on. Or it may push you away when you have begun to feel truly a part of what is happening. (p. 5)

As a narrative inquirer, I felt the same fluctuation that Bateson describes as an anthropologist or that Spradley speaks of as an ethnographer. I remember arriving at the school one Sunday to participate in a workbee in the secret garden, an environmental classroom being co-created by parents, students and staff. As I walked up to the fence surrounding the garden, I positioned myself as researcher, noting how many parents were there, how many staff, what tasks people were engaged in. As I set my notebook down on the grass, slipped on my gardening gloves and picked up a shovel, my position began to shift. An hour later, stopping to admire the stretch of clean pea gravel a few students, teachers and I had spread along the edge of the school, I was insider, parade participant, fellow gardener, pulled into "intense involvement in [this] experience," no longer "coolly looking on" through the garden's fence.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) speak about what occurs when the researcher is intensely involved with the experience studied.

> The point we wish to make is a version of what some, from a different inquiry point of view, have called the "problem of the influence of the observer on the observed." After having worked with a participant or in a classroom for the long haul, it can perhaps be seen more clearly that we are shaping the parade of events as we study the parade. As researchers, we watch ourselves shape the events under study.... (p. 87)

There were moments in my research experience when I became aware I was shaping the parade. One such moment arose in a conversation with Evelyn, the principal, about the story of my first Meet the Staff Night as a parent, the story where I likened the movement of parents through the school to the movement of cattle through the pens and alleyways of my dad's auction mart, where I wrote of being rushed in and rushed out, without being offered a welcoming cup of coffee or a chance for conversation. I left my story with her to read. I was anxious about the strength of the imagery and of how the images may have been received by Evelyn.

Debbie: I gave you that cattle story. I'd love to hear what you thought.

Evelyn: Oh, I loved that image!

Debbie: 'Cause I wasn't…I wasn't sure.

Evelyn: It was really interesting because I was thinking about our parent night here. I was debating whether I'd buy cookies or not. I was debating because parents come in, as principal you do your thing in the gym, parents go off to the classrooms. We do almost the same thing you were talking about, you know. Parents go to one classroom and then to another class. I'd never really quite thought about it that way but then reading your story I thought our parent night could easily have become that way if we didn't pay attention. And I thought, I'll never even question whether I should have cookies or not in the future. We did buy cookies and we did have coffee with the parents. This is the second year we've done it. It is funny though because I considered not buying cookies this year because we have practically no money to run our school. (taped conversation, October 29, 1998)[3]

As a participant in the Gardenview parade, I was there as an individual living a life story, a story with a narrative history, a narrative present, and a narrative future. As bits and pieces of my life story rubbed up against the edges of Evelyn's life story, the parade shifted. Having joined the Gardenview parade for a year, there were other times my life story rubbed up against Evelyn's, – or Dleif's, – or Sarah's, – or parents', – or teachers', and my presence, my participation in the parade, may have influenced it.

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[3] With the permission of participants, all excerpts from transcripts have been edited for readability through the removal of pauses, and such utterances as 'um,' 'uh,' 'like.'

Revisiting Dleif's comment about being unblendable, I've come to see that by being present as the parade moved along, by having my life touch the lives of others in the parade, by having my life story become a part of theirs and theirs a part of mine, I influenced the parade, shifted it in ways I am sometimes aware of and in ways I may not know.

Multiple Images of My Position in the Parade

Early in my research experience, I told Evelyn if there was anything she needed, I would be pleased to participate in whatever way I could. One afternoon, as I was talking with someone, Evelyn rushed up. She said breathlessly, "Remember the time you said you'd help me if I ever needed it?" I assured her I remembered. She explained hurriedly that a teacher had to leave the school early that day and she agreed to take the class. It was now time for her to join the students, but a colleague had dropped in to discuss something important. Would I take the class for her? I let her know I was pleased to help. As she began to move away, she quickly told me the grade five students were working on Power Point presentations in the library. All I needed to do was to circulate, encourage the students, respond to their questions and support them in solving any difficulties.

Stepping down into the open area library from the atrium, I could see the groups of students clustered around banks of computers, already deeply engaged in their work. I walked to one group of students and stood just to the side of them, watching their work on the computer. As they looked up to see who was there, I smiled and asked a few questions about their choice of graphics or photographs imported into their text. I commented on how impressive their work was and on their facility with Power Point. This process continued as I moved from group to group, chatting, encouraging, acknowledging, learning much about Power Point in the process.

Finally, on about my third round through the groups, one girl looked directly up at me and asked, "Who **are** you?" Her question caught me off guard. I remember standing there, wondering what to tell her, surprised that no one answer was easily available. My mind was muddled with questions: Should I say I'm a friend of the principal? Should I say I'm a teacher? Should I say I'm a supply teacher? Should I say I'm a parent? Should I say I'm a principal? Finally, mumbling something about being a researcher from the University of Alberta, I moved away. The young girl was satisfied with my response, I wasn't. The moment, a poignant one, caused me to attend to the multiplicity and complexity of being a researcher, a narrative inquirer.

Some of my dissatisfaction with my response to her came from those feelings of uncertainty. "Under the pressure of the moment, needing to respond, [I was] captured by some central point of focus.... But there is always more in any episode, much of it at the very edge of awareness, most of it in flux..." (Bateson, 1994, p. 8). While the label researcher was one point of focus, it did not address my urge to say I am also a teacher, a parent, a principal, a friend. I began to wonder once again about who I am as researcher in the Gardenview parade.

This wonder brought me back to another time in my life, standing at the front of an inservice room in the Centre for Education, Edmonton Public Schools central services building, looking out at the educators seated in front of me, my hands wet and clammy but my mouth unbelievably dry, my stomach churning with anxiety but my chest so tightly constricted it was hard to get air in and out of my lungs, all the time wondering how I would get through this first inservice day without everyone finding out I was really a teacher and not a consultant at all, as my newly appointed title would have them believe. I knew how to be a teacher, to live a teacher life, while 'consultant' just didn't fit my skin. I felt like an impostor.

Looking out from this new vantage point of consultant, I felt disoriented and unsure of myself. As Christmas approached, I decided to make gingerbread persons for my inservice participants, as I had for students in my classes. As I handed out gingerbread men and women, decorated in seasonal reds and greens, participants' names boldly printed in white across them, I regained my bearings. To the oohs and aahs and hugs and thank yous of my participants, I realized that being a consultant is being a teacher, the two are intertwined, connected, continuous. Once I let go of "some central point of focus" on being a consultant and attended to the "more" of that role, the relationships between consultant and teacher became visible and my knowing how to live a teacher life began to inform my "composing a life" (Bateson, 1989) as a consultant.

I tell you my impostor story because I realize that just as I had to figure out how to live the life of a consultant, I have had to think hard about what it means to be Debbie Pushor, at Gardenview School. Am I coming to Gardenview as a parent? Am I coming as a teacher? Am I coming as a principal? Am I coming as a researcher, separate from all of those other identities? The moment I realized I never left being a teacher behind to become a consultant was when I began to awaken to the multiplicity of my identity and of my life. I am Debbie Pushor, a woman, a daughter, a sister, a mother, a wife, a friend, a colleague. I am white, middle class, of rural background. I am a teacher, a consultant, a principal, a central services supervisor. All of these identities, and many more I have not named, form who I am as a researcher entering Gardenview School. They are lenses through which I see, experience, interpret, and make sense of the world around me.

Bateson (1994) opens Peripheral Visions by describing her experience at a Feast of Sacrifice in a Persian garden where, accompanied by her two and a half year old daughter, she witnessed the slaying of a sheep. She wrote,

> I was in that garden as a learner, an outsider, and yet, because I was there as a parent, I was simultaneously a teacher, an authority. Trying to understand and remember what I saw, I was also trying to establish an interpretation that would be appropriate for Vanni, one that would increase her understanding of the living world and her place in it and also bring her closer to the Iranians she would be living among for several years. At least, I wanted to leave her unfrightened. Out of that tense multiplicity of vision came the possibility for insight. (pp. 5-6)

Just as Bateson chose to attend to certain of her positionings in her telling of her experience of the Persian garden — those of learner, outsider, parent, teacher, authority—and not to others, I chose in my work to attend to my positionings as parent, as teacher, as principal, as researcher. I believe it is in exploring the tensions among these multiple positionings that the possibility of insight resides.

At various times, on and off the school landscape, I became aware of my positioning and I could feel that positioning shift, sometimes even within a single conversation or event. At times, I was seeing, hearing, feeling as a parent, at other times as a teacher. Sometimes I slipped easily into the position of principal, sometimes I felt like an observer, watching and listening, taking notes intently, aware of the significance of the conversation or event to the research without feeling positioned specifically in any other way.

As I shuffle through these photos in my hands, I'm drawn backward in time to the moments they were taken and I'm drawn inward to remembering the stories that surround the images. Backward and forward, inward and outward—these are directions in which our inquiries flow (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Like Laurence's river of now and then (1974) which flowed in both directions, the backward and forward flow in the narrative inquiry space is a temporal flow, one that moves between past, present and future. As I live my research experience, I am situated in the present, recalling and telling stories from my past, hoping to retell and relive those stories in my future with new possibilities. Like Morag's river-watching in The Diviners where she shifts from her outward watching of the swallows' movements over the water to her inward thinking about her daughter's sudden decision to leave, the inward and outward flow of narrative inquiry is an interactional flow, one that moves between the personal and the social. As I live my research experience, I am outwardly situated in an environment and yet I move inward to think about my experiences, to reflect on them, to make sense of them. As I tell stories of my positioning at Gardenview, I pay attention to the directional flow in the narrative inquiry space—to the backward and forward movement in time, to the inward and outward movement of the personal and social interactions—to provide a frame for the inquiry.

As I write about what I am coming to understand, I try to live an "ethic of caring—an ethic that has fidelity to persons and the quality of relations at its heart" (Noddings, 1986, p. 498). I try to honor the trust Evelyn, parents and staff placed in me through the way I continue to live in relationship with them, by protecting their anonymity and the confidentiality of research documents, and by sharing and discussing my writing with them before I share it with other audiences. In accepting the gift of being welcomed into the parade, I accept equally the responsibility which accompanies it.

My Positioning with Evelyn

Here's a photo of Evelyn's office. When we met to talk, it was generally around that small table. For taped conversations, we'd both get coffees first and kind of settle in.

Positioned as Principals

I realize I was often positioned as principal with Evelyn. Because our first connection to one another began when we were both principals, Evelyn often said things to me like, "Deb, when you were a principal did you...?" or "If you were the principal, what would you do about…?" or "You've been a principal so what do you think about…?" We often shared our principal stories, laying them beside each other, as we tried to learn from them.

In one of our first conversations, in response to Evelyn's reading of my story of Cohen's first day of school, we shared stories of our experiences as principals with the first day of school. While our conversation began with a parent story—my parent story—we moved to the position of principal to think about that story. With pictures of Julia Kiniski School vivid in my mind, I shared my recollections of moving from classroom to classroom, welcoming back returning students and getting to know new students. I had to admit to Evelyn that parents were not a significant part of my recalled images. Did they enter the classroom or watch their children through the large glass windows? Did they stay for part of the class or did they leave when the bell rang? Did they stay in the school, talking to one another? I told her I didn't know. I began to imagine scenarios where parents might be present throughout the school.

In response to my principal recollections, Evelyn spoke of her experience, as a principal newly appointed to a school, of finding the doors closed at the kindergarten entrance and both parents and children lined up outside:

> ...when I arrived, the very first day of school, the kindergarten teacher had, I remember this image, the children were lined up outside the door and so were the parents. ...And then the children were invited in but not the parents—it's the same thing! And I just went up to this kindergarten teacher and said, "I will not be able to live with this. You need to know it now." (taped conversation, October 29, 1998)

What I see as I think about our conversation is how our movement in time forward and backward, between past, present and future, and how our movement inward and outward, between personal and social, affects my positioning as a researcher. I began, in present time, sharing a story of my experience as a parent on my child's first day of school. In talking about my parent story, Evelyn and I moved back in time to previous first days as administrators and we laid my parent story beside our principal stories of other first days of school. In the telling of those principal stories, I moved inward to reflect on the emotions I felt regarding my lack of attending to parents. I moved outward again to imagine, with Evelyn, new possibilities for parents on the school landscape and then we moved forward to create new stories of future first days of school for parents. From this example, you can see who I am as researcher, and how I move in and out of these positions, depends on where I am positioned in the narrative inquiry space along the dimensions of temporality (past, present and future) and interaction (the personal and social).

Positioned as Parents

Other times when Evelyn and I talked, it wasn't our principal stories we told but our parent stories. Early in the school year we sat together in the staffroom, discussing our family's move to a new neighborhood. As we talked about the school in the new neighborhood, I shared that something important, that had to be in place before I considered the move, was a caring classroom environment for my children. I expressed how much it mattered to me as a parent that the teacher was able to see gifts in my children and to celebrate them, and that the teacher was able to see areas for growth in my children as possibilities rather than deficits. I could accept less of what I believed in some other areas as long as the classroom honored children.

Evelyn acknowledged my words with her own (grand)parent story. She told of her granddaughter's experience in first grade. Jennifer came home from school and said, "When I'm in school, I feel like my mouth is in a trap." Shocked by the powerful image Jennifer created, Evelyn explored what Jennifer meant. She learned that within Jennifer's grade one classroom there was a quiet fairy. For children who were quiet, the quiet fairy would leave a prize or reward in their desks. For children who were noisy or talkative, their names were put in a box drawn on the board—a 'chatter box.' Evelyn realized it was the weight of Jennifer's struggle to be silent which caused her to feel her mouth was in a trap.

As Evelyn shared this story, tears welled up in my eyes and the hurt I felt was the hurt of a parent. Evelyn and I struggled with how you protect your (grand)children from the pain of such experiences and with how you help teachers to see children's qualities as gifts. Evelyn expressed that while Jennifer struggled not to be a chatter box in grade one, she excelled in other school experiences when her mouth was not in a trap. Jennifer shines in dramatic activities and was, as a high school student, president of her school's Students' Union. Hearing this, more tears formed in my eyes and my joy was the joy of a parent (field notes, September 7, 1999).

In this example, my position as parent stayed constant throughout the conversation while Evelyn's shifted. I began by talking with Evelyn about a family event in present time, our settling into a new neighborhood. I shared personal concerns, inward considerations, about my hopes for my sons in the new school. My hopes caused Evelyn to move backward in time, out of the position of principal and into the position of grandmother, to her granddaughter's first year of school where her hopes for Jennifer were not being realized. Evelyn and I, in this narrative inquiry space, moved from present time to the past of Jennifer's grade one experience and then back to the present of Jennifer's high school experience. We moved from the personal space of our hopes for our children's schooling experiences to the social spaces of our conversation, of Jennifer's grade one classroom, and of my boys' new school. Our movements in this narrative inquiry space, backward and forward, inward and outward, brought us to be positioned similarly as parent/grandparent.

Positioned as Principal and Parent

Evelyn and I did not always come into conversation positioned in the same place—principal and principal, parent and parent. At times Evelyn, as principal, asked me to respond to something as a parent. Before I tell you the story of responding as a parent to Evelyn's draft letter about class placements though, I want to give you a sense of the history of our conversations around this topic.

In the spring, when Evelyn was thinking about students' placements into classes for the following school year, we talked about issues and concerns surrounding the class placement process. Should teachers decide on the class groupings of students? Should parents have a say in their child's placement within these groupings? How could the input of both parents and teachers be used to make class placement decisions? Should parents be able to request a specific teacher for their child? When parents do make such requests, are they making evaluative judgments about teachers' performance? When some parents make requests and those requests are honored, does that privilege some children and families over others? The more we talked, the more complex the questions seemed to become.

During one conversation, Evelyn described a meeting with a parent who came about her child's placement for the next school year. This parent described how painfully shy her child is and how difficult transitions are for him. In response, Evelyn asked the parent to provide her with one or two names of the child's friends so she could ensure he would enter a new classroom in September with a support system in place (field notes, May 21, 1999). In another conversation, Evelyn shared a note which a parent wrote to her detailing a fairly large group of children with whom she would like her child placed and providing an explanation for each request. In sharing this note, Evelyn exclaimed that what this parent didn't understand was that this one request would determine about one quarter of the students in the class (field notes, June 22, 1999). What was a sound practice in the first instance, because it honored the child's needs, did not appear to be a sound practice in the second instance because it restricted the consideration of other variables, such as a heterogeneous mix of students based on gender and ability, in determining the composition of the class. In our conversations, Evelyn and I continually struggled with honoring beliefs—about putting children first in decision-making, about creating a place for parent voice—which seemed to be contradictory or conflicting when we pictured them lived in practice.

Our conversation about class placements flowed over many days and many weeks, backtracking at times to re-explore situations previously discussed, forging ahead at others in an attempt to imagine new possibilities. We looked beyond the practices of Gardenview to practices in other schools. Did teachers in these schools determine the class lists? Was there a process for inviting parent input? Were parent requests honored? Considered? Acknowledged? Discouraged? We looked at the history of the class placement process at Gardenview and how the stories of past practices influence the development of the plotline for a new class placement story. Were some parents making requests for a specific teacher or for their child's friends to be in the class because those requests had been considered in the past? Were some parents trusting in the school's decisions about placement because of their current, and past, satisfaction with their child's teacher and program? Mostly during these conversations, Evelyn and I were both positioned as principals, as fellow educators, trying to think about these questions. There were times though, when we both moved to the place of parent to consider the questions, drawing on our experiences as mothers with our own children's placements, using a different lens through which to see the issues.

Then in June, nine months into our research journey, Evelyn and I were sitting in her office. Evelyn asked me to position myself as parent and respond to a letter she had written as principal. In past years Evelyn sent a letter home to parents about class placements. She wrote a draft letter and asked me to read it. As she handed it to me, she assured me it was just a draft and she hadn't yet made a decision about whether or not she was going to send it out, but that she'd like to know what I thought as a parent. I began to read. The words explained all the criteria staff use to make class placement decisions and asked parents to trust teachers' knowledge and expertise in the class placement process. As I read, a recollection of my friend Sue's tears and frustration over being shut out of the class placement process at her children's school burned in my mind. My own parent voice was crying out inside me, "No, this pushes parents into the margins of the school landscape!"

My response wasn't verbalized though because those weren't the only voices calling out inside me. Still looking at the page, I struggled inwardly. I was in relationship with Evelyn in a multiplicity of ways. As a beginning principal, Evelyn was a mentor and role model for me. Many times, over breakfast or lunch, I told her of my struggles and asked for her response and her advice. I left our meetings inspired and with a clearer sense of my beliefs. As a consultant, Evelyn was interested in sharing ideas about literature, poetry, music or metaphors for staff development sessions and generously shared her materials with me. When I came to talk with her about research at Gardenview, Evelyn listened thoughtfully to my wonders about the positioning of parents in the margins of school landscapes. She agreed to be a co-researcher, even though she felt vulnerable, knowing I would be hearing the stories of parents and staff about parents' engagement at Gardenview and that it was very possible she would be a key character in many of those stories. As a result, this moment of being asked to respond to the class placement letter was such a hard moment. If I said I had concerns about the letter, would I jeopardize my personal relationship with Evelyn? Would I jeopardize my research relationship?

I don't know how long I was silent and I don't know if the tension I felt was evident to Evelyn. Finally, I responded by sharing Sue's story of the school newsletter which stated teachers would develop class lists without parental input. I shared Sue's emotional response, as a school council chair and as a parent, and the conversations Sue and I had. I told her I felt, as a parent, the most significant decision affecting my children's year at school was who their teacher was going to be and I admitted that being left out of that decision was hard to accept.

Evelyn acknowledged all that I said, indicating that was why she was so uncertain about whether or not to send the letter. She reaffirmed her view that the class placement process was complex and conflicting, as we'd so often talked about, especially when she tried to honor everyone involved—children, teachers and parents. As she put the draft letter back into her folder, she smiled at me, easing the tension in the conversation, and commented there would be more drafts before anything was sent out. She was even considering holding the letter, only sending it out if the class placement process became a concern for parents, letting the situation unfold on its own otherwise. As I left Evelyn's office, I could feel the difference in today's conversation. I had been positioned distinct from Evelyn—her as principal, me as parent, and as a questioning parent at that (field notes, June 3, 1999).

In this last example, Evelyn's position as principal stayed constant throughout our conversation regarding her draft letter to parents. My position as parent stayed constant as I read her letter and as I responded to it but the formulation of my response was influenced not just by my experiences as a parent but also by many other positionings with Evelyn. Reading Evelyn's letter in present time, which addressed a possible approach to class placements, a possible future action, I was taken backward in time to Sue's telling of Darryl's decision to exclude parent input from the class placement process at her children's school. I was taken inward to my recollections of Sue's hurt and frustration and to my own memories and feelings of being positioned off the school landscape as a parent. Paralleling this movement backward in time and inward in reflection, in response to the content of Evelyn's letter, was a second move to past times and to a personal space, in response to my relationship with Evelyn. I moved back to the time of my acquaintance with Evelyn, to our past relationship as principals, to her previous support of my work as a consultant, and to the earlier establishment of our research relationship. I was flooded by my inward feelings for Evelyn—of respect, admiration, friendship and gratitude. As a result, my struggle in this personal space with how to respond to Evelyn's letter was compounded by my multiple positionings with her. From this inward space, I returned to the outward, social space, and to the present time, of my conversation with Evelyn where I responded to her letter. My response, and Evelyn's consideration of it, influenced a future action or decision.

In this narrative inquiry space, we moved from the present time to the past of my experiences as a parent, as a friend of Sue's, as a colleague of Evelyn's, returning to the present of Evelyn's letter and to the future of Evelyn's decision. We moved from the social space of our conversations about class placements to the personal, reflective space of my thoughts, feelings and memories of the positioning of parents off school landscapes and then back to a social, conversational space. You can see from this example the multiplicity and complexity of my positioning as parent with Evelyn and how that positioning within the narrative inquiry space is influenced by movements back and forth along a temporal dimension (past, present, future) and inward and outward along an interactional dimension (personal, social).

My Positioning with Parents

In my taped conversations with Gardenview parents, I recall how strongly I was positioned as a parent. Having a relaxed lunch with Stella at her kitchen table (April 28, 1999), enjoying a cup of tea with Rachel one rainy morning while her young pajama-clad son Jamie watched a show on television near us (August 31, 1999), perched on a stool at Kris's kitchen counter drinking coffee with her while her four year old daughter Carla made a card for a friend's birthday (November 27, 1998)—at each of these times I felt a bond to these women because we were parents sharing stories of our children and our children's lives, and stories of ourselves and our lives.

Danika

My morning with Danika and her preschool daughter Keltie at their home is one that resides with clarity in my mind (April 28, 1999). Like Dleif's comment, "Debbie Pushor, you are unblendable!" or the "Who **are** you?" question from the grade five student, it was an experience which caused me to be awake to who I was as a researcher and to how my position shifted depending upon how I was situated within the Gardenview parade. Walking along the parade route with Danika, sharing stories of our children and our experiences within their schools, I felt that 'insider' feeling, a feeling of being a fellow parent within the community. Danika and I had only met once. We were introduced by Kris, chair of the school council, one day when Danika was at Gardenview. We seemed to hit it off instantly. Danika responded enthusiastically to my research wonders and to my stories of being a parent positioned off the school landscape. She had many stories to tell surrounding past experiences with another school. How her stories of her experiences resonated with mine! Our conversation carried on over coffee in the staffroom at recess and ended with an agreement to get together to continue our conversation (field notes, March 18, 1999).

During my morning in Danika's home, Keltie, Danika and I sat together in the living room, gathered around the coffee table. While Danika and I talked, Keltie played with toys or snacked on Goldfish crackers. Watching Danika interact with Keltie, seeing her reach out to caress her or to respond to her questions, hearing her address her affectionately as "honey," I felt tied to Danika through my bonds with Teague and Quinn, my own young children. Danika and I were moms together, as we stepped back in our children's lives and their teachers stepped forward. We struggled to figure out how to have a place in their schooling and how to be viewed by educators as holders of knowledge about our children.

One story Danika told me was of her son Corbin's first day at school.

> Danika: [When Corbin, Keltie and I] arrived, everybody was sort of standing out in the coat area and the teacher, whom I'd heard a lot of wonderful things about, was very excited to meet Corbin. I went

forward immediately with Corbin and went to introduce myself. The teacher introduced herself to me and then said, "Now I'll just ask you to stand back. This morning is for the kids. Corbin, you just go in and I'll be in in a minute." There were a few parents, besides myself, and we were kind of just left.

Debbie: And you don't ask what to do or where to go at that point. I didn't ask on my first day with Cohen either.

Danika: I had actually taken the day off work to take Corbin to school and thought I'd spend a little time with him and get to know the teacher and some of the other parents. In hindsight, you think it would have been nice to have had a little tea or coffee or something just for the parents and the kids that first day. Some of the children were crying and so the parents would stay out in the corridor with that child and then the teacher helped them to integrate into the classroom. To be quite truthful, I left with Keltie very quickly because there was no opportunity to stay and go into the classroom.

Debbie: I could just cry because your story feels so much like my own story of Cohen's first day and my experience of not having a place at his school. When you were volunteering in Corbin's class, could Keltie go with you?

Danika: No, that was the other thing that happened. The teacher sent out a calendar with duty dates and the expectation was that the parent would come in on that day. So I sent a note to the teacher asking if I could bring Keltie in with me and didn't hear back from her. This was about two weeks before my duty day because I thought if she can't come with me, I've got to make babysitting arrangements for her. I didn't hear anything back so I sent another note to the teacher about three days before. I still didn't hear anything so I just assumed it was okay. In hindsight again I probably should have called her, but I thought the note…I mean, I knew she was getting it. So we arrived for the duty day, Keltie and I and Corbin. We walked into the classroom and the teacher looked up at us and said, "Oh, it's Corbin and his entourage."

Debbie: Oh no!

Danika: And that's a quote. I'll never forget that.
(taped conversation, April 28, 1999)

As Danika talked, I thought about my experiences as a parent volunteer with two preschoolers who, like Keltie, did not have a place in the school. Recollections of frantically trying to find childcare during the day when our high school sitter was in school and there were no available family members to care for Teague and Quinn, and of having to budget for the twenty-five dollars it cost each half-day I wanted to be a volunteer flashed through my mind. I was drawn to memories of my efforts to get a parent co-operative together to try and alleviate some of these concerns for myself and for other parents in response to the teacher's expressed need for greater parental assistance in the classroom. Sitting in Danika's living room, I felt again the emotion of leaving Teague and Quinn with someone they didn't know, once the co-operative was running, tears rolling down their faces as I left them in the doorway of a home that was strange to them. I remembered again how that emotion burned in my stomach all morning as I worked to engage myself in Cohen's life at school.

In this research space, I was positioned as a parent. Beginning in the present, both Danika and I moved back to past experiences of our sons' schools as we laid our stories beside one another. As Danika told her stories, I moved inward and pulled my own stories forward, sometimes bringing them outward to a shared social space, sometimes keeping them inside, reflecting on them in my personal space. This movement backward and forward in time, and inward and outward in our interactions, continued throughout the conversation as we talked about field trips, parent/teacher conferences and relationships with principals. The poignancy of Danika's experiences, both the positive and the negative, and the space, place and time in which she shared them, maintained my positioning as parent throughout my morning with her.

Susan

I came into conversation with Susan in a different way than with Danika. I first met Susan at Gardenview's school council meeting in December, 1998. On the agenda of that meeting, Susan was listed as the volunteer organization coordinator. As her family was new to the school in September, Susan was introduced to the parents and staff by Kris, school council chair. Susan agreed to coordinate this new undertaking of the council, the establishment of a system to enhance communication about parent volunteer opportunities within the school and to match volunteers with tasks of interest to them. During the conversation on this new volunteer organization, Susan spoke about the information she needed and about how the system would benefit individuals who wanted to help but didn't know how to get involved (field notes, December 3, 1998). As a researcher, I was interested in this new undertaking of the school council and in the many ways parents were involved in the school. I saw Susan in the school often because of her extensive involvement as a parent volunteer and one day asked her if we could meet for a taped conversation. She agreed.

Susan and I met at the school for our conversation, in a classroom not being used during that time. We carried our cups of coffee into the classroom and made a place to sit by pulling some desks together. As I set up my taperecorder and tested the microphone, I felt the unease those formalities of the researcher role create in me. That unease carried into the beginning of our conversation. As I asked Susan questions about her role as a parent volunteer in other schools, and as she responded to my questions, Susan and I were positioned as parent participant and researcher, engaged in a process that wasn't very comfortable for either of us. It wasn't until we began talking about our children and connecting our experiences as parents that the tension eased and the conversation began to flow.

As well as discussing the volunteer organization system Susan is coordinating, we talked about her role with the Young Authors' Conference Gardenview was hosting. Susan mentioned Evelyn told her I may bring Cohen to the conference.

Debbie: Yes. Evelyn had asked me, "How old is Cohen?" She said the Young Authors' Conference is for grades three and up. Since he's in grade three this year, she said he was welcome to come—which is really exciting because his school doesn't have an activity like that. When I went home and told him about it, he was so excited. Gordon Korman is his favorite author. I think I mentioned that to you the other day. So Cohen said, "Is Gordon Korman coming?" I said, "No, I think Gordon Korman lives too far away but Martin Godfrey has come in the past."

Susan: Was Gordon Korman the one that wrote his first book when he was thirteen years old?

Debbie: I think so. Isn't that amazing? He's still young and he's got so many published books. His writing really appeals to Cohen's sense of humor.

Susan: It's a boy thing.

Debbie: Cohen's a good reader and he was reading Martin Godfrey but his content is not always age appropriate for Cohen. There was this one book he started last year when he was in grade two. This boy/girl thing was happening and I thought, "No, this just isn't appropriate." He was able to read it but it just wasn't appropriate for him at this point, intellectually or socially. But Gordon Korman he can read and he thinks he's so hilarious. He loves the humor in all of Korman's books.

Susan: Justin is the same way. Justin's reading beyond his years but he's very.... Torin's more mature than he is in a lot of ways. We're at a point where we couldn't find books for Justin because some of them just do not interest him.

Our conversation continued with a discussion of children's series, and purchasing books through websites and bookstores, before it turned back to a research wonder of mine—a wonder about Susan's feelings of being welcomed into Gardenview as a parent. As we once again shifted into the roles of researcher and participant, the ease which developed as we talked as parents remained, and stories of Justin, of Torin, and of Cohen dotted the remainder of our conversation.

I've spoken a lot about the narrative inquiry space, in thinking about the many ways I was positioned with Evelyn and in how I was positioned with Danika. I'm sure you are getting a sense of the dimensions of temporality (movement back and forth between past, present and future) and interaction (movement back and forth between a personal space and a social space). In this instance, can you see how the movement in our conversation from Susan's past experiences as a parent volunteer to her current experiences at Gardenview to the upcoming Young Authors' Conference worked to position us as parents? Can you see how the conversation drew each of us inwards to our thoughts and knowing of our children and then outward again as we pulled stories of them forward to share with one another? While I remained positioned as parent throughout my conversation with Danika, with Susan I moved in and out of the positions of researcher and mom.

Kris

This shifting of positions between researcher and parent happened in a taped conversation with Kris too. Kris and I met at the school, in Evelyn's office while Evelyn was out of the school. Kris chairs the school council. We were meeting because I wanted to hear Kris's perspectives on the school council. I attended all the meetings—listening, observing, taking field notes—but I wanted to hear Kris's observations of how she felt things were going. I wanted to hear her thoughts and feelings regarding her hopes and intentions, her concerns and frustrations.

I began the conversation as a researcher, asking Kris to follow up on a couple of things from the last school council meeting. We talked about the clarification of roles and responsibilities between the school council and the fundraising association, about bylaws and autonomy for the two organizations and the upcoming events for each. We talked about communication and how members of the school council and the fundraising association were working to ensure all members of the parent community had an opportunity to be informed of, and involved in, what was happening. We talked about events the school was initiating. We talked about the sensitivity needed in trying to maintain the delicate balance between honoring past practices and making changes to strengthen the working of the council.

At different times during this conversation, I moved to the place of parent in response to a question, a comment, or a story of Kris's. Because I had also chaired a school council, my experiences kept coming to mind as I listened to Kris. As Kris told how the parents at Gardenview voted for all open meetings, rather than executive meetings followed by "town hall" meetings, I recounted my experience where some parents expressed concern that the executive meetings created an inner circle, generating dialogue that excluded some parents. While Kris and I didn't go through all the details, just touching on it evoked memories, images and emotions which placed me once again as parent, beside Kris as a fellow school council chair.

Later, Kris recounted how she said something in the school council meeting regarding some changes she would like to see made to an upcoming activity. She had inadvertently hurt another parent's feelings—a parent who played a key role in the event in the past. With tears in her eyes and a waver in her voice Kris proceeded:

> The statement meant nothing to anybody else and it had no impact except to her. I should have known better. I would never.... To her, it was a total lack of respect and I would never do that. I was speaking out of turn. I would have been able to get the same information across without stepping on her toes and by building on her efforts, acknowledging what she's done and springing off from there to try something new. There's a million ways I could have approached it. I wasn't thinking. I was crunched for time. (taped conversation, February 10, 1999)

Listening to Kris, the image of a parent from my school council experience formed in my mind. Kris's words touched a raw spot in me that instantly placed me back in my parent role as school council chair.

As I asked Kris about agenda items or conversations which were part of school council meetings, I was positioned as researcher, responding to the scribbles in the margins of my field notes: "Ask Kris about this," "Check minutes from organizational meeting," "Review School Council Handbook re: fundraising" (field notes, January 19, 1999). As Kris talked, though, I was drawn in by her stories. Bateson's (1994) words speak of how "a dissonance will break through and pull you into intense involvement in an experience you had distanced by thinking of yourself as coolly looking on" (p. 5). There were times when I was pulled into intense involvement as her experiences resonated with my own. There were times when I was pulled out of my position as researcher and into my position as parent as I moved back in time and inward in memory to my school council experiences.

The Influence of Place

In these three different conversations with parents, I remained strongly positioned as a parent with Danika while I shifted positioning between researcher and parent in conversations with Susan and Kris. The narrative inquiry space was the same in the three conversations: there was a temporal flow, a movement backward and forward between present, past and future time; there was an interactional flow, a movement inward and outward between the social space of the conversation and the personal space of our reflections, our feelings and our recollections. However, there was one difference in the three conversations—the place in which we were situated as we conversed. With Danika, I spent the morning in her home. With Susan and Kris, we met at Gardenview School. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) recognize the significance of place, a third dimension of the narrative inquiry space. Place, they write, "attends to the specific concrete physical and topological boundaries of inquiry landscapes" (p. 51).

As I left Gardenview School, the morning of my visit to Danika's home, I left the school place on the landscape to enter another place. Just as I have left behind the densely treed countryside of Northern Alberta to drive into the wide open spaces of Southern Alberta, I left behind the fields and playground structures of the schoolyard as I entered Danika's cul de sac and followed the curving street that runs alongside the carefully tended lawns of the individual homes.

The place of my childhood is Northern Alberta. As I travel 'home' from Edmonton, as I move more and more northerly and westerly, the feeling of the ever increasing denseness of the forested landscape, envelops me like a soft quilt gently draped around my shoulders. The trees give me a sense of security, of safety, of warmth. They are a significant feature of a place that, through my growing up, I came to know personally, I became connected to, I continue to find comfort in. As I move from my Edmonton place to the place of my childhood, I feel my positioning move too. I am much more a daughter, much more a sister, much more rural in this place. I am once more someone who knows how to milk a cow, ride a horse or drive a tractor. I am much less someone who facilitates professional development days for teachers, takes university courses or does research.

I have spent very little time in Southern Alberta during my lifetime. Early in my marriage, my husband Laurie and I travelled to Lethbridge occasionally to visit his granny or his aunt and uncle. Generally, though, Southern Alberta is a place we pass through when we are heading south to other destinations. I don't know this landscape the way I know the landscape of Northern Alberta. I find the wind wearing and disconcerting. I feel vulnerable and unprotected in the open, untreed spaces. In this place, I am positioned as traveller, as stranger, as passer-through.

I'm telling you this because it shows how significant place is to the way we're positioned—to the way I'm positioned as researcher in the Gardenview parade. Who I am in the rural landscape of Northern Alberta is different than who I am in the urban landscape of Edmonton. Unfamiliar places, as well as familiar ones, can shift our positioning. One place can position two people very differently.

I was born and raised in Northern Alberta. I moved to Edmonton in 1976 to begin university and I've lived here ever since, except for a two year period when I taught in Germany for the Canadian Department of National Defence. Having lived in Alberta about twenty eight years, prior to my experience in Germany, I thought I knew Alberta well. I will never forget, though, how amazed I was my first year back from Germany at the brilliance of the Alberta sunshine. While I continued to exclaim how sunny it was or how long the sun lasted each day, others did not seem to see the significance of the sun the way I did. I marvel at how my two years away, in an often foggy or smoggy climate, caused me to attend to the sunshine differently, to see it in a new way. Our positioning shifts as we move back and forth between places. Each position we assume gives us a new vantage point, a new lens through which to view the landscapes of our lives. The Alberta sunshine, that I did not attend to prior to my move, became foregrounded when I returned to Alberta and saw it through the lens of my German experience. Moving from one place to another and then back again enabled me to be positioned as a newcomer in a previously familiar place, thus giving me a new way of seeing that place.

In stories of my conversations with Evelyn and with parents Danika, Susan and

Kris, I've talked about how the movement backward and forward in time and the movement inward and outward in interactional space shifted my position—sometimes from parent to principal, at times from researcher to parent, at other times from parent to researcher—or sometimes kept my position constant. By introducing the third dimension of the narrative inquiry space, I want you to consider how place shifts my positioning within the research.

My conversation with Danika took place in her home. We sat in the living room which flows from the foyer and into the kitchen. As Danika made coffee, I set up my taperecorder and microphone. The smell of the freshly baked muffins cooling on the kitchen counter filled the air. Keltie gathered toys and brought them over to the chesterfield so she could be with her mom. After some time, Keltie wandered into the kitchen. Watching her gather a snack, but still in conversation with me, Danika moved to the kitchen to get a bowl for Keltie's crackers and to pour her some juice. The transcripts of our morning together capture Keltie's presence in our conversation. As I was getting ready to go, Danika, explaining to me that her grandfather lives with them, moved to her grandfather's room, just off the foyer, to let him know she was ready to take him to his medical appointment. I came to know Danika that morning, not just from her stories, but from watching her care for her daughter and her grandfather, from feeling her warmth and caring as she welcomed me and honored my research wonders, and from observing her in the context of her home.

I felt positioned as a parent with Danika during our conversation. I wonder if I would have felt as strongly positioned or if my positioning as parent would have stayed constant if we had met at the school for our conversation instead. Just as the place of my childhood—the intimate way I know it, the feelings it evokes in me, the connections it causes—shifts my positioning, so does the place of Danika's home. The smell of the muffins brought memories of the mornings Cohen and I made muffins to take to his class on my volunteer days. Watching Keltie organize a snack of crackers and juice reminded me of Quinn and Teague's plates of nacho chips which they smother in grated cheese so that we can make "cheese chips" in the microwave. The sights, the sounds, the people in Danika's home—the feelings they evoked, the connections they caused—all touched the parent in me. We were positioned as moms together, sharing our stories over coffee, surrounded by the sense of family in Danika's home.

With Susan, the unease which carried into the beginning of our conversation had a lot to do with place. The classroom in which we met was not familiar to either of us. As we shifted desks to make a table for the taperecorder and for our coffee, my research intentions were so apparent, so conspicuous, we felt strongly pulled into our positions as researcher and participant. It was only when our stories took us backward in time and inward in thought to the places of our homes, situating us with our children and their interests in reading, that we shifted from researchers to parents. Your positioning can be shifted not just by the present physical place of the conversation but also by the places you arrive at when your stories cause you to travel backward and forward in time and inward and outward in interactional space. It's the way time, space and place, either on their own or in some complex combination, influence the three dimensional narrative inquiry space that shifts your positioning.

With Kris, while the place of our conversation, Evelyn's office, was familiar to both of us, it was not a place in which we had talked before. We typically conversed in the staffroom or the workroom, places where we crossed paths in the school, and we often talked in the library before or after school council meetings. Our first scheduled conversation, unlike this one, took place in Kris's kitchen. Just like with Susan, this present physical place of our conversation contributed to positioning Kris and I as researcher and participant. There we were, sitting in a place that was neither hers nor mine, taperecorder and microphone the more obvious because of it. As we talked, it was the movement backward in time and inward in reflection on my experiences as school council chair that shifted the place of the narrative inquiry from Evelyn's office to Cohen's school, correspondingly shifting my positioning from researcher to parent. Throughout the conversation, changes in space, place and time in the three dimensional narrative inquiry space influenced my movements between researcher and parent, parent and researcher.

Place was important in my positioning with Evelyn too. While all of our conversations took place at Gardenview, our stories moved us to other places. Sharing a story of Cohen's first day of school, from my position as parent, caused Evelyn and me to relive other first days of school. Moving backward in time and inward in recalling other lived experiences, I moved to the place of my principalship, Julia Kiniski School, and Evelyn moved to the place of another school at which she had been principal. In another conversation, Evelyn told me the story of her granddaughter Jennifer and the quiet fairy in response to my concerns about moving and ensuring my three boys had teachers in their new school which honored their gifts as individuals. In moving inward, and pulling that story forward and outward to tell to me, Evelyn moved from the present time and place of Gardenview School and from her position as principal to the past, to the place of Jennifer's grade one classroom, with the chatterbox drawn on the blackboard, and to her position as grandparent. She then moved forward in time to Jennifer's experience as president of the Students' Union and to the place of Jennifer's high school, staying positioned all the while as grandparent. In yet another conversation, this time about class placements, I travelled from the present time and place of Evelyn's office as I read the draft copy of her newsletter to parents to a past remembered place where Sue told me the principal of her children's school had removed the opportunity for parents to have input into class placement decisions. This third dimension of the narrative inquiry space, place, plays a part in shifting position. Time, space and place all influence my movement between positionings as parent and principal and researcher, shifting who I am as a researcher at any given time in this narrative inquiry.

My Positioning with Staff

Positioned as Researcher

While my positioning shifted between researcher, principal and parent in my conversations and relationship with Evelyn and while it shifted between researcher and parent in my interactions with parents, I stayed positioned as researcher with the

Gardenview staff. My presence at staff meetings, and school events such as school assemblies, parent nights and Christmas concerts, with notebook and pen in hand, were well accepted. They seemed to understand my desire to be an observer at times like these, on the edge of events as I watched, listened, and made field notes, sometimes asking questions to clarify my understanding or to hear their thoughts and feelings. My participation at other times was also accepted. They invited me to join in their professional time activities, their celebrations, their staff socials, their work in the secret garden. They seemed to understand my desire to be involved at times like these, engaged in events and learning about their school landscape through experiencing it.

On the final day of my research at Gardenview School, the staff planned a special farewell celebration for me. As was their tradition with any staff leaving the school, they wrote a song for me. I share the first few verses from one section of "Deb's Song" because it shows what I mean about being positioned as researcher with the staff. Here, read these verses:

> (Sung to "La Vida Loca") **with feeling!!!!**
>
> She's into taking notes now
> Black book and ballpoint pen,
> We feel a premonition
> That girl has done it all.
>
> *Guitar solo*
>
> She's into parent councils
> Boring meetings in the night.
> She's got a new addiction
> A new thesis burning bright…
>
> She'll make you take your frown off and go dancing down the halls,
> She likes to live our crazy life
> Now isn't that INSANE
> Like a runaway freight train….COME ON….
> (Deb's Song, September 30, 1999)

The lyrics position me as researcher. They speak to my interest in joining their parade—or, in their words, living their crazy life—as both observer and participant.

Flipping through these photographs and recalling the experiences the photographic images evoke for me, it may appear to be a "crazy life" for a researcher—shovelling compost in the school's secret garden, reading The Table Where Rich People Sit (Baylor, 1994) to staff during professional time, painting clay pots with staff during a school opening activity. Here's a photo of me playing baseball with the staff after school one day. While that might not seem to have anything to do with my research on parents' positioning at Gardenview, it did. This activity, and all the others like it, gave the staff and me opportunities to get to know one another. Trust builds through time and contact and the staff needed to know and trust me if they were to share their stories of parents and their school lives with me. I wanted them to know that the words in my research ethics review—"minimal risk," "informed consent," "potential harm and benefit," "protection of the staff's anonymity and confidentiality" (Summary of Proposed Research Project, undated) did not represent an ethic of rights to me but instead an ethic of care (Noddings, 1992) and that it would be in a caring and thoughtful relationship that I would inquire, alongside them, into the positioning of parents on their school landscape.

There's another reason the baseball game, and the digging and the reading and the painting, were connected to my research. I've talked about joining Gardenview's parade, about walking alongside the parade participants; listening and watching for the stories they live and tell. All of the experiences captured in this pile of photos are a part of the procession and give me a rich and diverse sense of the Gardenview parade. They help me come to know and understand the staff and their school lives—as a participant, as an 'insider.'

These photos over here? Yes, they are still photos of my involvement in the 'crazy life' but they're just a little bit different. This is a picture of the birthday cakes I made for Michael, the school's head custodian. Everyone took a turn bringing cakes for someone else's birthday. This is a shot of me helping to set up for Parent Night in September. I was arranging baskets of coffee mugs and trays of baking. Everyone had so much to do that day getting ready for their presentations and for welcoming parents into their classrooms and into the school that I tried to help in whatever way I could. Oh, this photo of me unloading the dishwasher in the staffroom makes me laugh! It reminds me of a day when I happened to be unloading the dishwasher just as recess began. As Sam came in, she looked at me and said, "I never want to get a PhD." Surprised by her comment, I asked her why. She responded, laughing, "You have to do too many dishes" (field notes, May 21, 1999).

While all these photos also show my involvement in the 'crazy life,' they speak to my attempts at reciprocity, my attempts to give something back to the staff for welcoming me into their parade. By helping with dishes and clean up, with supervision or answering phones, with planning and facilitating special events, by baking cookies, or cakes, or muffins for the staff, I hoped to contribute something to the life of the school as well as receive the opportunity to learn from it. At the conference of the American Educational Research Association in Montreal in April, 1999, a presenter spoke scathingly of researchers' use of schools as "data plantations," harvesting data with no concern for those whose work the data represents (Jordan-Irvine, 1999). The image she created lived with me, causing me to attend carefully to the reciprocity in my research relationships; to not just what I was getting as 'data,' but to what I was giving back.

Just as the staff captured my positioning as researcher with them in the song they wrote and performed for me, both as observer and as participant, they also captured this aspect of reciprocity.

> She walked into old [Gardenview]
> It's a loud and busy place
> Washed our dishes, made us coffee
> Made us muffins…we had our fill,
> She always wears a flower
> When she serves us our cuisine,
> Since she's gonna leave us,
> Well, WE just might go insane!…We just might go insane!
> (Deb's Song, September 30, 1999)

Once again, their lyrics illustrate how solidly I was positioned as researcher with the staff.

Do you want to know why I was wearing a flower? As you can guess, there's a story behind that too! Before I tell you, let me finish what I was saying about my positioning with the staff.

So much of what I did with the staff I don't have photos of. Who takes photos of someone taking notes at a staff meeting, or an assembly, or a concert? At many staff or school wide events, I wasn't participating but instead was making field notes, playing the researcher part as an observer. Here's a photo that gives you a small glimpse of this aspect of my positioning as researcher. I'm sitting with Cecille, Matt and Jessica at the grade six farewell dinner. I was interested in observing that evening because the event was jointly planned by parents and staff.

Many things came out of my field notes from observations like this one, from conversations in the staffroom, from activities noted on the monthly calendar in the school newsletter, from just being present in the school, which I then chose to follow up on. After seeing Maria's processes for demonstrating and communicating student growth to parents during a child's student led conference, I asked if she'd meet with me to share what she does, and what the evolution of these processes has been. During a conversation with Evelyn about the volunteer organization system being developed by parents at Gardenview, she mentioned I may find it interesting to meet with Kendall, a teacher with a specific parent volunteer structure in place in her classroom. Interested in the experiences the four first year teachers were having working with parents and knowing about the place of parents in their undergraduate teacher education program, I arranged to meet with them after school for a conversation. Realizing that Elizabeth, prior to her two years at Gardenview, taught in an inner city school, I asked if she would share her perspective regarding parent positioning at Gardenview, laying her two experiences alongside one another. Wanting a better sense of the history of parent positioning at Gardenview School, I asked Hope, Ron and John to share their thoughts on any shifts they observed in the involvement of parents from the opening of Gardenview School to the present time. Wanting to see the role of parents during a fieldtrip, I asked Jacqueline, Kaitlyn and George if I could accompany them on a full day fieldtrip the three classes were taking together which involved a large number of parent volunteers.

The reasons we came together, the way we came together in conversation with taperecorder or field notebook present, kept me positioned as researcher in my relationship with them. Even though many of the staff knew me as a consultant from a professional development session I facilitated at Gardenview three years prior to my research, even though many knew of my role as principal of Julia Kiniski School, even though I told staff that my interest in my research topic arose out of my own experiences as a parent and while I spoke of my children often at Gardenview, my role as researcher remained foregrounded.

When I think of my positioning with staff in relation to the three dimensional narrative inquiry space, I see that movement backward and forward in time, inward and outward in interaction, and from the place of Gardenview to other places was generally done by the teachers in response to my research wonders. Staying positioned as researcher, I moved with the teachers along the three dimensions of the narrative inquiry space, continuing each time to return to the present time and place of Gardenview, always with greater insight and understanding.

Let me play this staff movement in the three dimensional narrative inquiry space out through one example. In a conversation about the history of parent positioning at Gardenview, Ron, Hope and John moved back in time to the opening of Gardenview School. They moved inward to recall stories of the school's opening, of the part the principal played in that opening, of the part that parents played. They moved to the place that Gardenview School was then.

Ron: …it was like a construction site. …we were all wearing hardhats but we're still, you know, open for business type thing and I mean there were rug people everywhere and

Hope: carpets were still being laid and

Ron: and you know painters and everything....

They moved outward to the social space and the present time of our conversation to share their recollections, filling in pieces in each other's memories, sometimes remembering collectively as pieces of stories began to come together like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.

Debbie: ...And what part did parents play in that opening? Were they the audience for the opening ceremony or did they have a part to play in planning it? Do you know?

John: Very vague recollection.

Hope: I don't think they had a very large role at all.

Ron: No.

Hope: Every class or classrooms were paired up or did a nice little...presentation. If you can get a hold of that video, that would be kind of nice.

Ron: But I don't think the parents were too involved.

Hope: No, they were not very involved at all. I remember a [Mary Campbell] probably said a few words.

Debbie: Okay, because she was on the school council at that time?

Hope: Yes, and I remember her because I had her child the previous year, so that name's familiar to me. ...but other than that, there was no

Ron: not in the operation of the concert or whatever at the opening. Because we were practicing on our own. There weren't too many parents around.

Hope: That's right.

Ron: And like you said, the parents were the audience that night. (taped conversation, May 25, 1999)

Staying positioned as researcher in the present time and place of Gardenview School and in the social space of our conversation, I prompted Ron, Hope and John to move between the past and the present, between the inward recollections and the outward tellings, between the Gardenviews that were then and the Gardenview that is now. I watched as they moved along these three dimensions, gathering puzzle pieces to form jigsaw images of parents' positioning on the Gardenview landscape at different points in the history of the school.

Creating a Shift in My Positioning

I did say I'd get back to the story about wearing the flower. I haven't found any pictures of that event while we were talking; I guess no one took any. In the stories I've told about my positioning—with Evelyn, with parents, with the staff—the shifts in my position which occurred as I moved between researcher, parent or principal were not conscious shifts, ones that I made deliberately, but shifts which occurred because of movement within space, place or time. Within my conversation with Evelyn about first days of school, I flowed into the position of principal. As my conversation with Susan moved to the upcoming Young Authors' Conference, my positioning moved, in response, to that of Cohen's mom. This flower story is different. In this situation, I made a decision to shift my positioning with staff—to play a parent role rather than researcher role.

It was mid-September, just two weeks before my research year at Gardenview was to end. I arrived and popped into Evelyn's office to let her know I was there. She mentioned the superintendent was planning to visit the school in a couple of days. I asked Evelyn if there was anything I could do to help prepare for his visit. She mentioned she wanted a sit down lunch so that staff would have time to talk with the superintendent rather than standing in a buffet line to get food. She talked over the idea of the sit down lunch with Stella, a parent with expertise at planning and facilitating special events. Stella agreed to organize the luncheon and to get parents to serve lunch to the staff and the superintendent. Evelyn acknowledged what a large task Stella was taking on and wondered if I would mind calling to see if I could support her with the luncheon. I let Evelyn know that I'd enjoy working with Stella and would be in touch right away.

I called Stella at home that evening and offered to help with Friday's luncheon. Stella was pleased to get some help. After discussing the menu she and Evelyn planned, Stella ran through her plans for the table settings. Before we hung up, we decided on the details as well as the things each of us would do. I then called Evelyn, excited about sharing the plans and wanting an okay on purchasing the things we needed (field notes, September 15, 1999).

The next morning I set off with Teague and Quinn, positioned as parent volunteer with young children, to complete my list of errands. After returning home for lunch and then taking my boys to school, I drove to Gardenview to touch bases with Evelyn and Stella. We reviewed everything one more time. Stella and I arranged to meet at the school the next morning at 10:15 a.m. to set tables. Stella reminded me to wear a black skirt and white blouse, mentioning that she would bring aprons for the four of us serving.

There was an air of excitement at Gardenview when I arrived the next morning. The positive anticipation and energy that surrounds any special event could be felt in the office and the staffroom. As soon as the staffroom emptied after recess, Stella and I moved into high gear. We raced to get the tables set, the napkins folded, the vases arranged, and the candles in their holders. When Rachel arrived, bringing more cutlery with her, we completed the table settings and began to fill water glasses with ice, lemon and water. Once the coffee was all set up, Paige arrived from work and the four of us donned aprons. As a fun touch, Stella tucked some daisies into the bows at the front of our aprons and into our hair.

This was the first moment in this event where I physically felt the shift in positioning to that of parent at Gardenview. I felt an anxious twist in my stomach as I tucked the daisy into my hair. Everything else I had done in preparing for this event, although done in my mind from the position of parent volunteer, could also have been seen as being done from the position of researcher in the eyes of the staff—as another opportunity to join the parade, or perhaps as another opportunity for reciprocity.

Putting the flower in my hair was a concrete act of stepping out of my place as researcher with the staff at Gardenview and into the position of parent. The daisy signified that I was now a member of the parent group at this luncheon.

With the candles lit and all the finishing touches in place, the lunch break was upon us. We moved to the prearranged tables from which we would serve the food. As Monica, a member of the staff, dressed the salads she had made, and Stella and Rachel filled the baskets with homemade buns, Paige and I began to uncover the lasagnes. With the staff gathered, we were asked to join the others in the staffroom for a prayer before the meal. It was a second moment when I felt my shift in positioning from researcher with the staff to parent. As I stood with the other parents, daisy in my hair, the staff saw, for the first time, my shift in positioning. When the prayer ended one staff member said, "You should be sitting in here with us for lunch." I just smiled and said I was happy to help.

As Paige and I filled plates with salad and lasagne, Stella and Rachel served the staff. Once everyone had been served and dessert was ready to go, Paige and I joined Stella and Rachel in the staffroom, refilling water glasses, clearing dinner plates, and serving coffee. As I moved from my role in the workroom into one of serving the staff, a number of other teachers also commented quietly to me as I moved around the table that I should be eating lunch with them rather than serving it. Just as I physically experienced, through the twist in the pit of my stomach, the change in my position as I put the daisy in my hair, staff members also displayed a discomfort, through their words and expressions, with my change of position. It was a first. While I had been positioned alongside parents before, at school council meetings, counting money or delivering lunches to classrooms for the hot lunch program, there had never before been an either/or situation like this one where I had to choose whether I would be positioned with staff or with parents at Gardenview.

As the bell rang to end lunch and staff moved back to their classrooms, Evelyn introduced the parents to the superintendent. When it came to me, Evelyn reminded the superintendent I was there doing my research and she commented on the many diverse things I had been engaged in as a researcher throughout my time at Gardenview. The superintendent smiled at me and asked, "What does serving lunch to staff have to do with your research?" His question was a good one. I talked with him about my overall intention as a researcher to join the Gardenview parade and about my specific intention that day to be positioned as a parent during this event. I told him that to understand the positioning of parents on the Gardenview landscape I believed I needed to experience parent positioning through my feelings, and my thoughts about those feelings, not just observe it. Through responding to his question, the anxiety I was feeling about my shift in position began to ease. Although it had been uncomfortable to be in a different role with staff, it had been fun to plan and serve the luncheon with the other parents. I developed a greater understanding of changes in positioning, and had more to think about in relation to the positioning of parents on school landscapes.

A Photographic Montage: Who am I as Researcher?

In trying to visualize this multiplicity of positions, I am drawn to thinking about the color separation experiment my boys like to do. After having colored a large black felt dot on a coffee filter, they squeeze a drop or two of water onto it and watch the colors emerge out of it. They are always amazed that black is not black at all, but is really made up of blues and reds and purples. When I ask myself the question, "Who am I as researcher at Gardenview?" I realize the answer lies in the blues and reds and purples of my life—in my multiple positionings as parent, as teacher, and as principal. Who I am as researcher becomes visible not from one, or even two or three, of these photos. Only by sharing them all or by gathering a number of them together, from

each band of color, to create a montage, a single photographic image of combined, superimposed, and juxtaposed parts of different photographs (The Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1976), could I begin to photographically represent who I am as researcher.

Recurring Images

Just as you can see the blues and reds and purples of the large black felt dot when you do a color separation, just as you can see my positionings as parent, teacher, principal when you consider who I am as researcher, my research experiences are comprised of bands of blues and reds and purples—the images which recurred throughout my year at Gardenview. It is these recurring images that I turn to in the remaining chapters.

Arriving at Gardenview, I noted the presence of a student phone in the foyer, a phone students could use to call home during the day. I observed parents coming at lunch time to eat with their children. I saw preschoolers engaged in activity as parents completed volunteer tasks. I saw families attending student demonstrations of learning. I watched parents moving freely in and out of the staffroom, having coffee and interacting with staff. When I shared these recurring images with Evelyn, and with parents, they were surprised I saw them as significant. This band of color, this welcoming families to Gardenview, rather than just welcoming students, was a part of their ongoing parade. In Chapter III, I attend to the 'blues' of welcoming families to school.

As part of joining the Gardenview parade, I attended school council meetings. From the first meeting I attended in November, 1998 through to the meeting in May, 1999, government funding for public education was a key topic of discussion. Recurring images of forums, letter-writing campaigns, parent meetings and presentations by MLAs, trustees, the Deputy Minister of Education, and the Minister of Education blended together to form another strong band of color. In Chapter IV, I attend to the 'reds' of parent advocacy for increased funding for public education, both on and off the Gardenview landscape.

Beginning my research in October, 1998, the class placement process Gardenview had just been through with the September opening was still a part of the ongoing conversation. Having heard Sue's stories of experiencing the class placement process first with Hanna and then with Darryl, my interest in the conversation was heightened. What story of class placements would be lived on the Gardenview landscape? While Evelyn and I continued to talk about class placements throughout my research year, I was able to observe the unfolding process through May, June, August, 1999. Through capturing recurring images of the class placement process, and through reliving and retelling stories of the process with Evelyn and with parents following the 1999 school opening, another band of color emerged. In Chapter V, I attend to the 'purples' of parent voice and participation in the placement of children into classes.

Gardenview is a school with many, many parent volunteers. Every day parents can be observed working in classrooms, shelving books in the library, preparing materials in the workroom, accompanying classes on fieldtrips. For special events, the school fills with parents willing to help—to cook pancakes, distribute hot lunches, decorate the gym. Parents serve on the school council and the fundraising association. They facilitate the learnathon, work casinos, and raffle tickets for the front seats at the Christmas concert. Having experienced the positioning of parent volunteer in relation to the school landscape and having McGilp and Michael's (1994) parent categories of "audience, spectators, fund raisers, aides and organizers" (p. 2) resonate with my experiences, I was attune to recurring images of parent involvement at Gardenview School. The band of color formed by these recurring images was broad and bold. In Chapter VI, I attend to the 'oranges' of parent involvement and participation.

As a parent committee at Gardenview put together a volunteer organization system, one parent, Katherine, asked why the system only addressed clerical tasks for parents and not involvement in curriculum. The moment was a significant one. Would this be a question that shifted the way in which parents were involved at Gardenview? Could this moment shift the Gardenview parade? From this point on, I continued to observe for ways in which parents engaged in curriculum with staff and children. The establishment of an environmental classroom, a secret garden, became a place of promise for a new story of parent participation. A narrow, yet seemingly important, band of color, formed by recurring images of the secret garden, became visible. This band of color was strengthened by research off the Gardenview landscape, through a project to give parents voice in curriculum, co-researched with Michelle Maiani. In Chapter VII, I attend to the 'yellows' of parent participation in curriculum, on and off the Gardenview landscape.

I revisit the bands of color, the blues, reds, purples, oranges and yellows, in Chapter VIII. I return to the images, to the movies that surround them, and I look at them through yet another lens. How can attending to these recurring images inform our understanding of the positioning of parents in relation to school landscapes? How can attending bring into focus opportunities to change parents' positioning or to change the landscape of schooling itself?

In Chapter IX, I reflect on my research experiences and those images which provide still frames of possibility.

CHAPTER III
WELCOMING FAMILIES

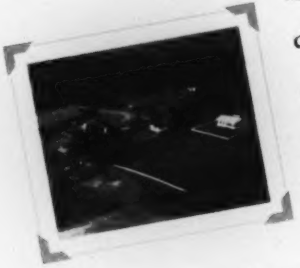
> To *attend* means to be present, sometimes with companionship, sometimes with patience. It means to take care of. …I believe that if we can learn a deeper noticing of the world around us, this will be the basis of effective concern. (Bateson, 1994, p. 109)

I was a companion to parade participants at Gardenview, someone who stepped into their parade, someone who became a part of it. It is now with patience that I relive parade moments, using multiple lenses to attend to the bands of color which separated out from my field texts, using multiple lenses to gain a deeper noticing of the school landscape and parents' positioning in relation to it. As I begin my exploration, attending to the 'blues' of welcoming families, I use a lens that sees small and a lens that sees big.

Seeing Small, Seeing Big

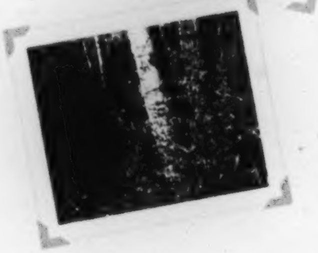
When I sit surrounded by my research data, my field texts, from my year at Gardenview School, I am sometimes overwhelmed. My filing cabinet drawer spills over with field notes, transcripts of taped conversations, school newsletters, notices, and minutes of meetings. My desk drawer rattles as I tug it open to search through my multitude of audio cassettes of taped conversations. My folder of photographs bulges open with packages of snapshots taken at various times and places. With all these pages and pages, with all the hours and hours of recorded conversations, how will I ever make sense of all these field texts?

Situated with everything around me, all of it in sight at one time, I am reminded of the view I get from an airplane window. About a year and a half ago, I flew to Vancouver. Looking down through the window of the airplane at the countryside surrounding Edmonton, I was amazed by the exactness of each piece of land, neatly measured and divided in complete uniformity with those surrounding it. Straight, definitive lines running in each direction clearly demarcated each section of land, each piece of property. From this far distance, the land resembled a patchwork quilt—a collective of individually crafted and detailed quilt squares stitched carefully together along common borders. Each square was detailed by the darkness of fertile soil or the lightness of golden ripening crops, the denseness of heavy green woods or the sparseness of open, cultivated fields, the flatness of prairie land or the contours of rolling hills. I was struck by the contrasts—the dark and the light, the dense and the sparse, the flat and the contoured, the smooth and the textured, the repetitive and the random—and by how all of those contrasts were tied together with such strong, straight boundaries.

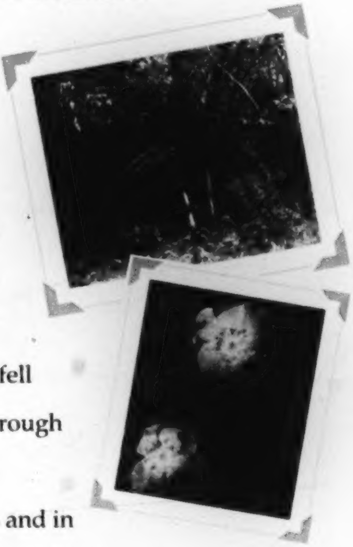


This view of the land from the plane window brought me back to my childhood; to my days growing up on a farm in Northern Alberta. I remembered the flat wooden sticks, tied with bright orange fluorescent plastic ribbon, protruding from the ground and of being told those were surveyors' stakes. I remembered the cutlines we travelled as pathways or roadways into the bush to pick blueberries or to go and see the beaver dam. I remembered words like 'section,' 'quarter,' 'range,' 'township' and 'meridian' which I would hear in conversations about the land. For me at that time, those words and experiences did not create a picture of the land in my mindlike the one I could see as I looked down through the wisps of clouds to the neatly quilted countryside far below.

My images of the land as a child were images created through its interweaving with my life. My sense of the land was a sense made up of intimate details, not of pattern and ordered regularity. When I picture the land it is not the quilt squares I see. Instead, it is the winding roads and tangled underbrush, the horse and cattle paths meandering their way through stands of trees and across open fields, the mossy



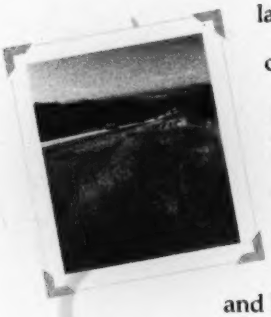
muskegs and the reed-filled sloughs. My mind fills with recalled images of the bright yellow buttercups growing in the creek in the spring, of the smell of the wild roses as I walked up the driveway after school in the heat of the afternoon, of the feel of the moss as my feet sank down into its spongy damp depths, of the cool darkness of the willow forts we created on those long, hot summer days, of the sweet fresh taste of the tiny wild strawberries that grew all through the ditches and unmowed perimeters of our yard, of the constant nighttime croak of the frogs as I fell asleep each evening. I have come to know the land through all of my senses. I have come to know the land in its intricacies and its subtleties, in its nooks and crannies and in its special spaces and the gifts they offer. It is only when I fly above the land that I am brought to see it in another form. It is only at times like that I am awakened once again to the order imposed upon it. It is only then that the stitching between the quilt squares becomes more evident and more central to the view of the land than the richness and quality of the squares themselves.



When I think about my knowing of the land, my coming to know has a lot to do with seeing things big rather than seeing things small. Greene (1995) writes:

> To see things or people small, one chooses to see from a detached point of view, to watch behaviors from the perspective of a system, to be concerned with trends and tendencies rather than the intentionality and concreteness of everyday life. To see things or people big, one must resist viewing other human beings as mere objects or chess pieces and view them in their integrity and particularity instead. One must see from the point of view of the participant in the midst of what is happening if one is to be privy to the plans people make, the initiatives they take, the uncertainties they face. (p. 10)

From my detached position looking down from the airplane window, I saw the Alberta landscape small. I saw the patterns and the regularities, the trends and tendencies, the uniformity of the land parcels. I saw the system of roadways and the pathways worn into the soil by the consistent and unceasing movement of farm equipment over the land season upon season.



From my childhood experiences growing up on a farm, I saw the Alberta landscape big. I saw the details and the specificity, the complexity and richness of each minute aspect of the landscape. When I shift from seeing small to seeing big, I shift from seeing only density to seeing the intricacies of the dense stand of trees, light filtering softly through the thickly overhanging branches, softly touching the saplings and long, tangled grasses far underneath. I shift from seeing only sparseness to seeing the subtleties of the softly undulating barley crop which shelters the dark, damp earth and houses a world teeming with life. Seeing big, I see intricacies and particularities, I see specifics rather than generalities, I see the concrete rather than the unknown.

From my office vantage point, my research data is as neatly measured and divided as the land. Colored file folders, labelled with the months of the year, clearly demarcate each 'section' of data in complete uniformity with those in front of it and those behind it in the filing cabinet drawer. Each folder is filled with papers – the transcripts, field notes, newsletters and notices I mentioned earlier. As I open the drawer, I see the contrasts of the dark red folder of December and the light orange of October. I see the contrasts of the density of the May folder and the sparseness of the July folder. I see how all of these contrasts are tied together by the stiff cardboard folders and the strong, straight boundaries imposed by the metal cabinet drawer. I see small.

From my lived experience, my sense of my research data is a sense made up of intimate details, not of pattern and ordered regularity. When I picture Gardenview it is not the folders of data I imagine. I close my eyes and I hear again the sounds of laughter in the staffroom, the voices of children singing, "We are children, children of the light…," the engaged conversation of parents at a school council meeting. I see again the sunlight streaming through the skylight into the foyer, the parents, children and staff digging and raking in the secret garden, a father putting his arm around his daughter's shoulders and pulling her close to him at the grade six farewell. I feel again both the ache and exhilaration of parents as I recall their stories of their experiences with school, the friendship and warmth of the staff, the emotion of school-wide celebrations. I shift from seeing the pieces of paper which form the denseness or sparseness of the dark and light folders to attending to the details and specificity, the complexity and richness of the stories, the experiences, the moments and memories recorded on the pages. I see big.

Knowing Gardenview not from the vantage point of a passenger looking out through an airplane window but from the vantage point of a parade participant, I will continue to make sense of what I have come to know by sharing stories and pictures with you, by thinking hard about the intricacies and particularities, by seeing things and people big.

From Still Frames to Moving Pictures

I have another package of photographs here. I separated these from the others awhile back because, for me, they all tell stories of the welcoming of families to Gardenview School. "*I keep the snapshots not for what they show but for what is hidden in them*" (Laurence, 1974, p. 14). While what is recorded in the snapshot helps you form an image, this stilled image does not give you a sense of what lives at the edges of the photograph, of what surrounds it. Remember the River of Now and Then, the river that flowed both ways? Do you mind if I let the wind of my memories push back against the current of present time for just a few minutes while I relive and retell stories of the images in these photographs? I hope that my words will transform these still frames into moving pictures, into "memorybank movies" (p. 22).

Snapshot

> *The telephone rests on the top of an oldfashioned student desk situated at the corner of the foyer just outside the large glass office windows. On the wooden desk sit a pencil jar filled with interesting looking pencils and a small box containing pieces of note paper. On the wall above the desk blue letters, accented by bright paper cutouts of children, form the words* STUDENT PHONE.

Memorybank Movie

One of the first things I noticed at Gardenview was the presence of a student phone. At various points throughout the day, a student would come, quickly use the phone, and go. During breaks and after school, the phone was used fairly frequently although I never observed lineups of students waiting to use the phone. There appeared to be an ebb and flow that required no monitoring.

After observing this use of the student phone on a couple of different occasions, I asked Evelyn to share the thinking behind the student phone. She said it was placed there so that children could have contact with home during the day. While she expressed that the phone is used for many reasons, Evelyn mentioned how she has seen children pick up the phone on their way out the door and say, "Hi Mom! I'm leaving now, I'll be home in five minutes." When I asked Evelyn if students need permission to use the phone, she explained the phone is available to students at Gardenview the way it is in a home, with similar courtesies expected in regard to timing of call and length of use (field notes, October 29, 1998).

Evelyn's words caused me to think about student use of a telephone at Cohen's school. If Cohen wanted to use a phone at school, he needed to ask permission from his teacher, sharing the reason why he wanted to make a call. If the teacher approved, he received a phone pass which he then presented at the office.

Evelyn's words caused me to think about my own telephone contact with Cohen's school as a parent. In Cohen's grade one year, Teague and Quinn were two years old and taking naps in the afternoon. If the boys were still asleep as it neared time to pick up Cohen from school, I would sometimes call the school and arrange for Cohen to walk home with an older student on our block so that I would not have to wake Teague and Quinn, load them in their carseats or the wagon, and head off to school with two tired, crying toddlers. When I read the message about telephone use printed in a school newsletter Cohen brought home as he began second grade, I felt guilty for the calls I made in the past. Let me get that school newsletter and show you the article.

> **TELEPHONE**
> **School phones are intended for official school business. We try to not interrupt classroom instruction with messages from home. Students are better able to focus on their studies when they are aware of their daily routines ahead of time. Your understanding that uninterrupted learning is of importance is appreciated.**
>
> **Students will be given permission to use the telephone in the following circumstances with approval from their teacher:**
> **a) to notify parents that the student is remaining after school**
> **b) to inform parents of illness**
> **c) teacher request**
> **d) emergency situation**
>
> **Students should leave home with all the items they will require such as school supplies, homework and lunch. Please help us to help your child develop a sense of responsibility. Students may not use the telephone to change plans for lunch or after school. (School newsletter, September 12, 1997)**

To me, the newsletter message stated that a connection between children and their parents was not possible during the school day. I am sure that touching bases with Cohen, or having Cohen touch bases with me, would not fall into the category of 'official school business.' It felt like our home was separated from Cohen during the school's operational hours and Cohen's life at home, as complex as it sometimes was with two little brothers, was not to interfere with the seriousness of his 'studies.' From the point of reading this message on, I woke Teague and Quinn from their naps each day to pick up Cohen from school, no matter how tired they were, no matter how much I agonized in doing so. From this point on, I hesitated in making any call to the school, always weighing first whether my call would be perceived as an interruption or of merit.

Looking Beyond the Images

I make this comparison between Gardenview and my son's school not because I believe one is a 'good' school and one is a 'bad' school, but because "it is contrast that makes learning possible" (Bateson, 1994, p. 27).

> *Insight*, I believe, refers to that depth of understanding that comes by setting experiences, yours and mine, familiar and exotic, new and old, side by side, learning by letting them speak to one another. (p. 14)

When I set the two scenarios of student telephone use side by side, when I let them speak to one another, what I notice is the difference in the way the two school staffs see.

> When applied to schooling, the vision that sees things big brings us in close contact with details and particularities that cannot be reduced to statistics or even to the measurable. ...There are the bulletin boards crammed with notices and instructions, here and there interlaced with children's drawings or an outspoken poem. There are graffiti, paper cutouts, uniformed figures in the city schools; official voices blaring in and around; sudden shimmers when artists visit; circles of young people writing in journals and attending to stories. (Greene, 1995, p. 10)

At Gardenview, it is a vision that sees things big that imagines a space for a student telephone. It is a vision that attends to particularities such as a child's request to tell his mom that he's just lost a tooth or to another child's need to let her parents know she's gotten to school safely on her new bike or to the crying child's need to hear his mom's comforting words when he says how sad he is still feeling about his hamster's death. And, too, it is a vision that provides students with the opportunity to talk to their parents about the details of a forgotten lunch or library book, about the need for skates for this afternoon's gym class, or how great it would be to go to Kenneth's after school. By seeing things big, this vision recognizes the diverse and multifaceted nature of the lives of the near 500 students who spend their days at Gardenview and it provides an opportunity for students to talk with their parents about their day at school while it is still unfolding. The family is welcomed into the school through the telephone lines – being invited by their children to provide support, advice, or acknowledgement for their challenges or celebrations.

> The vision that sees things small looks at schooling through the lenses of a system – a vantage point of power or existing ideologies – taking a primarily technical point of view. …Whatever the precise vantage point, seeing schooling small is preoccupied with test scores, "time on task," management procedures, ethnic and racial percentages, and accountability measures, while it screens out the faces and gestures of individuals, of actual living persons. (Greene, 1995, p. 11)

At Cohen's school it is a vision that sees things small that does not imagine a space for a student telephone. It is a vision that uses the lens of "official school business" to focus on management procedures and accountability measures for students. It is a vision that uses the lens of "classroom instruction" or "uninterrupted learning" to focus on test scores and time on task. The faces and gestures of the children who want to tell their parents about their lost teeth, their safe trips to school on their new bikes or their sadness over the loss of their hamsters are screened out when policies such as this telephone use policy are developed.

So what is it that causes us as educators to see small rather than to see big? What is it that causes us to see through "the lenses of a system" rather than a lens that "brings us in close contact with details and particularities"?

Snapshot

> *A father and a daughter sit at a round table in an open area space just outside a grade three classroom. Spread out on the table in front of them are sandwiches, juice, apples and cookies. The faces of the two individuals are happy as they engage in conversation over their shared lunch.*

Memorybank Movie

While I was sitting in the school library, an open area space in the center of the school from which all wings of classrooms extend out, I watched a father enter the school through the front entrance with lunch bags in his hand. He walked through the foyer, across the library and to the doorway of a classroom where he waited briefly until his daughter arrived. He gave her a hug and they moved to the table you saw in the photograph, just outside of her classroom. Their conversation started immediately as they unpacked their lunches and began to eat. While other students ate their lunches in their classrooms and as students began to move outdoors, the father and daughter continued to sit at the table, eating their lunches and talking. When they finished eating, they repacked what was left of their lunches and hugged one another good-bye. As the father retraced his steps through the library and out the front entrance, the little girl returned to her classroom to get her coat and to join her friends on the playground.

Curious about the interaction I just witnessed, I went in search of Evelyn to learn more about Gardenview's lunchtime practices. In sharing my observation with Evelyn, she smiled and shrugged it off nonchalantly, saying that it is a common occurrence to have parents come and join their children for lunch. In response, I asked if the father would have made arrangements with the office or with his daughter's teacher to bring lunch and eat with her. Evelyn shook her head no, saying that parents know they are welcome to flow in and out of the school and to take advantage of any time they have to spend with their children, whether it is at lunchtime or joining in with classroom activities (field notes, October 29, 1998).

In a taped conversation with Evelyn later that day, we spent more time talking about the welcoming of parents into schools.

Evelyn: I think it's an excellent point – the entry; it's the entry into the school.

Debbie: It makes all the difference in the world if we believe we're welcoming families.

Evelyn: I think five years ago – seven years ago – whatever – schools were still to a certain degree masters of their own kingdom. …This is our school, everything we do in here, nobody questions it, this is our domain. It is no longer though. The whole community really is in the

> school. It's a totally different time and I think some educators have not adjusted to that. (taped conversation, October 29, 1998)

In November I met for the first time with Kris, chair of the school council. Still thinking about the entry of parents into schools, I shared with Kris my memorybank movie of the father and daughter eating lunch together at school. Kris, too, smiled at my story, saying that it is "just the environment of the school, the teachers are great and the school is welcoming" (field notes, November 27, 1998).

Looking Beyond the Images

Evelyn's words about the whole community being in the school brought me back to one of the first conversations we had. As we talked about my interest in the positioning of parents in relation to the school landscape, Evelyn made reference to Hargreave's & Fullan's book What's Worth Fighting For Out There? (1998). She shared their premise that what used to be "out there," distanced from schools, has now permeated the boundaries of schools and found a way in. The parents and community, and the social, societal and economic issues of our world are now "in here." Evelyn affirmed that when she thinks of her experience as a principal over time, the premise that what was out there has moved in holds true. In her first assignment, she remembered, her focus was on the children and the staff; on the individuals who actually spent their days in the school building. Now, in this principalship, at a later time and in a different place, parents are very much a part of what she attends to. When I asked her what she thinks has made the difference, she talked about the changes in the provincial context which have come about through a move to school-based decision making and through the establishment of school councils (field notes, October 2, 1998).

Of necessity, legislators see small. Positioned at a distance from schools, like passengers looking out an airplane window, they assume a system's perspective. They develop policies and structures to reinforce or shift patterns they see being 'worn into the soil' of school landscapes. They develop policies and structures to respond to 'trends and tendencies' in education and in the larger social-political context. Under

School Councils on the Alberta Learning website, it states "School councils are created to give a stronger voice to parents and community members in their local schools and to recognize and reaffirm their right to meaningful involvement in education" (http://ednet.edc.gov.ab.ca/parents/). Under Partners in Education, it states, "The Government of Alberta promotes school-based decision making to ensure local needs and priorities are met" (http://ednet.edc.gov.ab.ca/education system/our students). These statements indicate legislators see that parents and community members are 'out there,' positioned on the margins of the school landscape, and not positioned inside with educators. The creation of school councils and the promotion of school-based decision making, then, are attempts, through a lens of seeing small, to shift the patterns being lived out on school landscapes and to bring those on the outside in.

But are parents now 'in' our schools as Hargreaves & Fullan propose and as the new legislation and structures suggest? What do we see when we switch from seeing little to seeing big?

When I look again at the last snapshot and replay the accompanying memorybank movie, I see a dad who knew he was welcome to come to the school and to create a lunch space for his daughter and himself. I see, through the hugs and the happy faces, a father and daughter who are enjoying this time they are able to spend together. I can only assume the particularities: perhaps it's the little girl's birthday, perhaps Dad has an evening meeting—or is going out of town—and so wants to spend time with his daughter before he goes. Perhaps the little girl was upset this morning and Dad wants to be sure she is feeling all right now—Perhaps—Perhaps. As Dad comes and has lunch, living out with his daughter the particularities of their family life in the midst of her school day, it appears that he is feeling 'in' at Gardenview.

But other movies are replaying themselves in my head too....

Rerun #1:
Reliving the Class Placement Story: Sue's Thoughts, Images, Memories

As the movie opens, Sue is seated tensely on a folding chair in her campsite at Michelon

Lake. She is leaning forward, her face intense, her voice betraying the hurt and anger she is feeling. Tears form in her eyes as she tells me her story.

> *Deb, I sat in disbelief as I read and reread this item. I couldn't believe I was understanding it correctly. I couldn't believe it was really saying staff, without any input from parents, would be creating the class lists. I couldn't accept that staff truly believe this is "the best way." Questions screamed out: What about what parents believe is "the best way"? What about the school's belief statement which says, "...we believe in the shared responsibility of parents, staff, students and community to maximize learning and growth for students'? I wondered if, as parents, we only get to share responsibility when the school determines it's okay for us to do so. I wondered why it is that we can share responsibility when it comes to photocopying, laminating, supervising field trips or choosing the school photographer but when it comes to such things as the placement of our children in classes, curriculum delivery or allocation of resources, responsibilities which truly affect teaching and learning, we no longer have a shared place. The bold print directing parents not to make specific requests served to emphasize just where our place as parents was.*

Rerun #2:
The First Day of School: Thoughts, Images, Memories

As the movie opens, I am in the portable at the back of the school where the kindergarten aide is meeting with parents. Still wiping away the tears shed during my conversation with Hanna, the school principal, and still struggling to get control of my emotions on this first day of school for Cohen, I am settling Teague and Quinn on a blanket with some toys and pouring myself a cup of coffee.

> *The kindergarten aide began sharing information, which she explained, the kindergarten teachers had determined we would need as parents to support our children's program: information about backpacks, inside shoes, snacks, entry and dismissal times. She told us there was concern last year, from teachers with classrooms close to the kindergarten, because of the hallway noise as parents with small children came to pick up kindergartners at early dismissal time. As a result, a decision had been made that parents were to wait outside the school until the program aide opened the door to let us in. If felt like I'd been slapped! I remember feeling like an intruder—someone who couldn't be trusted to be quiet in the hallways, someone who didn't belong in the school!*

Other movies surface—Danika being told by Corbin's teacher on the first day of school, "...stand back. This morning is for the kids." —my feelings of being herded in and out of Cohen's school at Meet the Teacher Night.

When I lay all of these movies beside one another, when I look at them through a lens that sees big, I begin to see the tentativeness surrounding whether parents are 'in here' or 'out there.' At Gardenview, at least in this memorybank movie, the dad was 'in' — welcomed to create a lunch space for himself and his daughter. At her children's school, Sue was 'out there,' excluded as a parent and as a school council chair, from having a voice in the class placement process. At Cohen's school, I was 'out there' (both figuratively and literally), asked to wait outside the school until the kindergarten aide opened the door to let parents in to pick up our children. At Corbin's school, Danika was 'out there,' told to stand back as her son entered the classroom. At Meet the Teacher Night, I was once again 'out there,' my movements directed by a ticking clock and a ringing bell. When I see all of these movies big, when the faces and gestures of the Sues and the Danikas are not screened out, when I attend to the details and particularities of my own experiences in relation to the landscape of school, the question, "Who is 'in here' and who is 'out there'?", no longer seems important. The important question seems to be,**"Who decides?"**

With this question in my mind, I turn to a third snapshot.

Snapshot

> *A group of children sit together at a round table in an open area space outside a grade two classroom. All of the children are similar in age except for one much younger girl. The children are holding books and appear to be sharing a story. A parent sits with the children, helping and encouraging them.*

Memorybank Movie

While I was walking around Gardenview one morning, observing and jotting field notes, I wandered into a wing of the school where parents were working with small groups of children. Kris was there working with some students on their computer projects. The other mom, the one in the photograph reading with children, I had not yet met. Kris introduced us and spoke to her of my research interests — that was how I came to know Danika. As I told you previously, Danika and I seemed to hit it off instantly. As recess approached and the children prepared to go outside, Danika pointed out her daughters: Emma, in grade two, and her preschooler Keltie. Danika helped Keltie put her jacket on before Keltie scurried outside to play with her big sister Emma and her friends. As Danika and I walked to the staffroom together to have coffee, I remarked on Keltie's presence in the school. Danika acknowledged that one of the reasons she enjoys coming to Gardenview to volunteer is because Keltie is also welcomed and included in whatever activities are taking place. She commented on how valued these times at school are for all of them (field notes, March 18, 1999).

Later, after spending time with Danika in her home talking about her experiences when Corbin started school, I understood more deeply why the opportunity to bring Keltie to Gardenview with her meant so much. You remember how Danika was asked to stand back and told the morning was for kids? Do you remember also how she was left in the hallway outside the classroom, not invited to stay or welcomed with a cup of coffee and then, some days later as she arrived with Keltie to volunteer, she was greeted with, "Oh, it's Corbin and his entourage!"? Lay that beside the memorybank movie I just played for you: three year old Keltie reading with the older children at the table and then joining them on the playground for recess, Danika moving comfortably into the staffroom for coffee and a conversation with me. When you lay the two stories beside one another, the difference in Danika and Keltie's lived experiences of being unwelcomed in one school and welcomed into another becomes tangible. It can be seen and heard and felt in Danika's words and in the intensity of emotion contained in those words.

I know that emotion from my own experiences too—of trying to find childcare for Teague and Quinn, of working to establish a kindergarten parents' babysitting co-operative, of leaving Teague and Quinn with people they didn't know in homes that were unfamiliar. I wonder if anyone at Cohen's school realized that my volunteer time was really the gift of three individuals. I wonder if they realized how much I struggled with wanting to give time to Cohen at school yet realizing that meant taking time away from my other two children. I wonder how I would have felt if Quinn and

Teague could have flowed in and out of activities in Cohen's classroom the way Keltie did in Emma's.

Looking Beyond the Images

While the question, "Who decides?", is important to the positioning of Danika in an 'in here' or an 'out there' place in relation to the school landscape, it becomes an equally important question in relation to Keltie's positioning. Seeing small, once again through that systems lens, we see structures such as the school council and school based decision making which are attempts to legitimize the place and voice of parents within schools. No matter how hard we look through that system lens, we see no such structures within schools which attempt to create a place for siblings of children attending school, for other members of the family.

As snapshots continued to accumulate in my photo album throughout the spring and fall—snapshots like the one of the student telephone, of the dad and daughter having lunch together, of this one of Danika working with a group of students which included her preschooler Keltie—I came to see the welcoming in at Gardenview as not just a welcoming in of students but instead a welcoming in of families. Seeing big, attending to the details of moments and captured experiences, I saw Keltie sharing a story with a group of grade two students, included in her sister's learning activities, I saw her putting on her coat and kissing her mom goodbye as she moved outdoors to play on the playground with Emma and her friends at recess time. And yet, at the same time, surrounding these snapshots were my images of Teague and Quinn standing sadly with tears rolling down their cheeks as I left them behind to go and volunteer in Cohen's classroom. The tentativeness of Keltie's positioning 'in here' becomes apparent when it is laid next to Quinn and Teague's positioning 'out there.' As I reflect on why she was 'in' while they were 'out,' I once again have to ask myself, "Who decides?" Who gets to say who can play and who can not?

As I look beyond the images in my snapshots to the movies which surround them, the title of Paley's book You Can't Say You Can't Play (1992) runs over and over in my head. What if the persons deciding who is 'in here' on the school landscape couldn't say to anyone—to parents, to preschoolers, to other members of the students' families—"You can't play." What would happen if everyone got to play?

Paley's rule came about because of her concern about the lived experiences of exclusion in her kindergarten classroom. She began to talk to her students, and to students of other ages in the school, about what their responses would be to a rule that said, "You can't say you can't play." After a brief introduction of this new rule, Paley (1992) posed two questions to each group of students she met with: "Is the new rule fair? Can it work?" (p. 33). While all the children agreed the "you can't say you can't play" rule would make things fairer, many believed it would not work. The children gave reasons such as the rule would make play less fun, it would take years to get used to, exclusion is a fact of life and something you have to learn to deal with, and friends are more important than fairness. Other children were convinced that the boss is the person to decide who gets to play and who doesn't. Paley found herself "disturbed by this unchallenged acceptance of a boss" (p. 46).

I find myself disturbed that we do not ask in schools, "who decides?" What would be the results within schools of accepting a "you can't say you can't play" rule? Would such a 'rule,' which positioned parents and family members 'in here,' change life on the school landscape? Would it make it less fun? Would such a rule take years to get used to? Is the exclusion of parents and family members within schools a fact of life and something we all have to learn to deal with? Are there issues more important than fairness when we consider who gets to play on school landscapes?

Snapshot

> *Evelyn is sitting at a table in the foyer of the school with a stack of file folders, a notebook and a pen before her. Surrounding her work on the table are children's Easter books, potted flowers, bunnies and a basket filled with small foil-wrapped Easter eggs. Evelyn's one hand is resting gently on the shoulder of a young child while the other is extended, offering the child an Easter egg. The child's parents and two older brothers are standing with Evelyn and the child.*

Memorybank Movie

I was observing at Gardenview during student led conferences in March, occasionally stopping to chat with parents or staff in the library or foyer as I moved from classroom to classroom. I stopped to talk with Evelyn as I passed by. She mentioned to me how she liked to work in the atrium during conference times so that she could greet parents and children as they came into the school or as they left to go home. As she handed out Easter eggs to all the children, I was reminded of a conversation I had with Kris last November, just after the first conference period. Kris described to me then how Evelyn sat in the foyer greeting every single person that entered the school, giving out special pencils to all children, those who attend Gardenview and their younger or older siblings as well. Kris mentioned that younger siblings played on computers, read books in the library or played with puppets at the theatre in the foyer during the conferences. Looking around me, I could see that same engagement by preschoolers during this conference period. A little girl sorted through the puppets in the basket beside the puppet theatre while another young child flipped through the pages of a big book.

As I shared earlier, in October Evelyn and I talked about welcoming families to a school. We returned to this conversation once again in December. Our conversation first centred around the attendance of parents at the Christmas concert at which I had been present, then moved to parents' involvement in preparing the Breakfast with Santa for all the students, and next to November's parent-student-teacher conferences at which I had not been a participant observer.

Evelyn: I told all of the kids that I had something special for them so they had to come and see me in the atrium to get it. I gave them a pencil which said "Children First" which is our guiding principle.... Then I could say to the kids, "So, how was your conference? Were you proud of yourself?" Then I'd say, "What about Mom and Dad?" So I had a chance to make a connection with just about every family that came into the school.

Debbie: Kris was impressed because she said siblings got pencils too.

Evelyn: Oh, of course.

Debbie: She made a point of telling me about that.

Evelyn: See, and I wouldn't even think about that.

Debbie: It's huge, Evelyn. Those are things that I just don't see happening in other places.

Evelyn: Ya, I wouldn't even...I mean, what are you going to do Debbie? If you've got an eight year old standing there getting a pencil and a four year old looking at you with these big eyes, you're going to give them a pencil too.

Debbie: Well, in the first place, the four year old wouldn't be there. And in the second place, if the four year old was there, you'd say, "Well honey, when you get old enough and you go to school

Evelyn: you'll get one too." ...So those little things are important. For example, there are schools where parents aren't allowed in the staffroom, that still exists.

Debbie: I know of a school which has a parent room and a staffroom.

Evelyn: I think that's so wrong.

Debbie: Me too.

Evelyn: I was in a school like that and it took me until Christmas to get the parents into the staffroom because, had I done it immediately, there would have been a very big rebellion. Actually, it happened here too, my first year here.

Debbie: Interesting.

Evelyn: When I came here, parents were not allowed in the staffroom...and they thought they were being treated like second class citizens. ...They could have their coffee in the little community kitchen. They could do all the work in the school but they were not allowed in the teachers' staffroom. ...A parent came up to me when I first came here and said, "Are we allowed in the staffroom?" That really kind of surprised me...and I said, "The staffroom doesn't belong to us, it's the school's staffroom. It belongs to everyone so of course you can come in." Then what happened was one of the teachers said at the very first meeting, "Are parents going to be allowed in the staffroom?" I said, "Absolutely!" That's how I handled it here because that was somebody else's battle to fight and it wasn't going to be mine. I think parents should be welcomed. I'm sure some people went out and grumbled but it just kind of happened here and I just had a feel that that's how I could handle it.

> Debbie: It's been really interesting talking about whether we welcome a family or whether we welcome a child. Does a child come [to school] in the context of a family or not? (taped conversation October 29, 1998)

In many ways, I lived in two worlds during my research time at Gardenview. As a parent at Cohen's school, I lived in a world where children were welcomed into the school. On his birthday, the principal came to see Cohen and presented him with a birthday pencil while his classmates sang to him. He received certificates and positive notes from his teachers for his accomplishments. His work was displayed within his classroom and in school hallways and it was celebrated at assemblies. He was recognized within the school newsletter for his participation in special activities such as track events. I believe Cohen felt welcomed and comfortable within his school and that his place there was a positive one.

As a parent, I didn't feel that same sense of welcoming and place. I've already told a story of Cohen's first day of school where I wasn't sure what to do or where to be and of how I felt anything but welcomed. I've told the story of my first Meet the Teacher Night and how I felt herded in and herded out. These feelings of lack of place didn't just surround first days or special events. I wasn't sure what to do as a parent volunteer either. At recess, should I stay in the classroom and do some work for the teacher? Should I go outside and play with Cohen? Should I go to the staffroom and get a coffee? Should I stay in the staffroom to drink my coffee or take it back to the classroom?

When Cohen was in kindergarten, the program aide often invited me to the staffroom to have coffee and sat with me during recess when I was in volunteering. Because the teacher didn't join us, I always wondered, though, if I should have stayed in the classroom to help with a task of some kind. Later in the year when the program aide was no longer there every morning, I was no longer sure what to do. I began to go outside with Cohen and the other children during recess, playing games with them on the playground, positioning myself with the children rather than with the staff. I would then slip into the staffroom when recess ended, get a coffee, and return to the classroom with it. Each year, with each different teacher, I was uncertain again about what to do. I tried to watch and follow their lead, getting a sense of what seemed to be appropriate. Finally, in Cohen's grade three year, I shared my uncertainty with his teacher over my place at the school. She acknowledged subtle shifts in the school landscape, like staffroom doors now being kept closed, which contributed to my feelings of uncertainty about parent place. She acknowledged that as a teacher within the school she too felt the uncertainty and was unsure herself about whether or not she should invite parents into the staffroom.

As a researcher at Gardenview, I lived in a world where families were welcomed into the school. Coffee and cookies were set out in the atrium after events such as the Christmas concert or the Parent Night. Parents lingered over coffee, visiting with one another, visiting with the staff, feeling invited to stay. I remember watching Keslie, the school librarian, enter the staffroom with a group of parent volunteers one morning recess during the book fair, offering everyone a cup of coffee or tea (field notes, March 24, 1999). I remember walking into the staffroom one afternoon not long before dismissal time and encountering a group of fathers who had just returned from a fieldtrip, engaged in conversation with one another over coffee. Maria, their children's teacher, popped in a few minutes later to put some more coffee on and to be sure they were finding what they needed before she hurried back to class (field notes, May 27, 1999). Preschoolers were welcome to come to the school with their parents—when they volunteered, when they attended school assemblies or special events, when they participated in their children's conferences. All children, regardless of age or enrolment, received pencils or Easter eggs from the principal. There appeared to be a place for all members of a family at Gardenview—for the children attending, for their parents, and for their siblings.

Looking Beyond the Images

Pencils? Easter eggs? Cups of coffee? How important are they?

Evelyn says the little things are important. And I think she's right. It's not the pencil itself—or the Easter egg—or the coffee, it's what these things represent.

Evelyn: That's a key question that you're asking. Do we welcome a child into a school or do we welcome a family? That's the critical philosophical difference. (taped conversation, December 10, 1998)

I remember being in the staffroom one morning at recess not long before Gardenview's Parent Appreciation. The staff planned a beautiful reception for parents, "Hats Off To You," playing on a top hats and tails theme. They decided they would all wear white and black clothing, white aprons and gloves, and serve parents hors-d'oeuvres and beverages from silver trays. A lot of effort and planning went into the event and the staff were really excited about it. As the conversation during that morning recess centred around the upcoming event, one teacher shared a conversation he had with a family member, also an educator, who expressed concern about teachers putting themselves in a subservient role with parents. Whereas the staff saw themselves as playing the role of good hosts, it was apparent this educator saw the staff as placing themselves in a servant role. The staff were frustrated by this misinterpretation of the event; at the individual's inability to see serving hors d'oeurves and beverages as a relational gift to parents (field notes, June 11, 1999).

I think about times I've played the host on a school landscape—welcoming visiting educators or student teachers to Julia Kiniski School when I was principal. I reflect back on how we greeted our guests in the foyer as they arrived, offering to hang their coats, to get them coffee. As they settled in the staffroom, one of the teachers or I would welcome them to our school and spend a few minutes talking about our school philosophy and organization, before inviting them to visit classrooms. Sometimes our students would provide a guided tour, sometimes members of staff would do a walk through with visitors. Other times we would give our guests a map of the school and an orientation of the physical layout and then invite them to move throughout the school freely as their interests directed them. In hanging their coats, in serving them coffee, in orienting them to our school, we were hoping to make them feel welcome and comfortable. We were wanting to begin a relationship of colleagiality, of sharing and conversation. We were wanting to be hospitable. So what does hospitality mean? What does it imply?

In an electronic newsletter for individuals with disabilities, Condeluci includes a piece entitled, "Hospitality: The Second Step to Inclusion" (The UCP Voice, Winter 1999). He writes, "The notion of hospitality is about extending oneself to others; it is about welcoming the stranger; it is about considering the good in all people."

I am struck by the word 'hospitality' and I am struck by the link made between hospitality and inclusion. I wonder why the hospitality the Gardenview staff was extending to parents was uncomfortable for this educator. I wonder if that discomfort had something to do with the way parents were being positioned on the school landscape, to the way they were included. When I look up the word 'include,' I find the definition "comprise or embrace as part of a whole" (Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1976, p. 545) and then I ask myself, "What do Evelyn and I mean when we use the term 'welcoming families'? Is it hospitality we are talking about? Is it inclusion? Is it even more than that?

I turn back to our first conversation about welcoming families and I reread our words. Evelyn's voice speaks to me again. Words and phrases stand out on the page as Evelyn shares with me her thoughts and beliefs about parents. I capture those words, scattered throughout the thirty seven pages of our transcript, and arrange them in the form of a found poem (Butler-Kisber, 1998). I chose this form because I want you to feel Evelyn's words as well as to see and hear them.

Evelyn's Words

Thinking about
a smooth entry for parents...

For me, it's an opportunity.
the welcoming
and **children first**
Not trying to separate
the home from the school
IMPORTANT messages
The MOST IMPORTANT message

children in a ***caring*** environment.
Parents are **part of our circle**.
Parents are no longer outside of the school,
they're in the school.
That's part of the program.
The target: welcoming
invitational
this is ***their home***.

Parents not allowed in the staffroom,
that still exists.
And it's wrong!
The staffroom ***belongs***
not to us, but
to the school
to everyone.
What an insult! What's the message?
(...need to call the staffroom something else.)

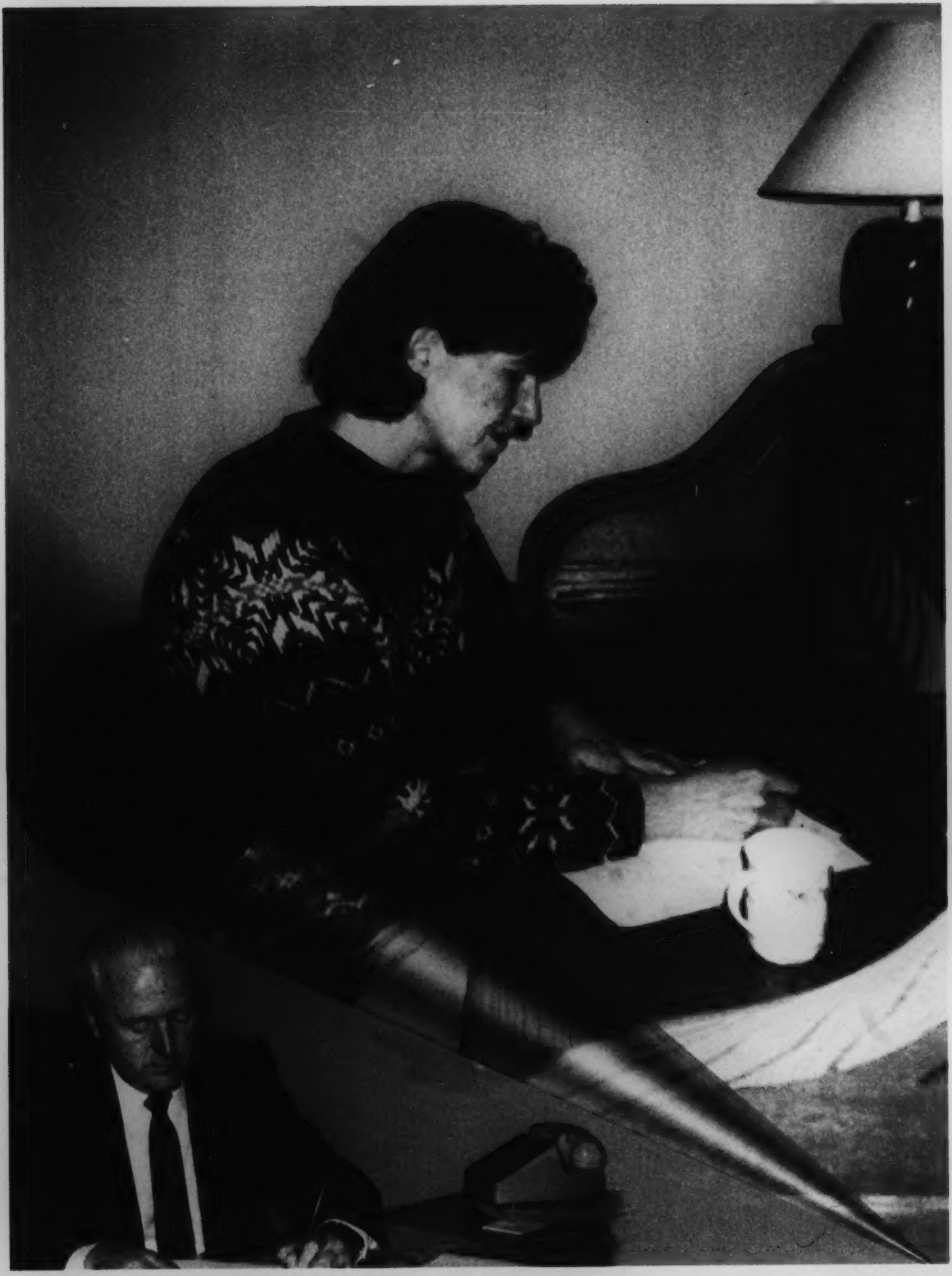
To ***listen*** to parents:
A music teacher?
We hired a music teacher.
Small classes?
We have small classes.
(No money, but small classes.)
"Now we need you to help us,"
that's what I say to them.
Living in a time when parents
are a MORE IMPORTANT part of school,
more than in the past.

I don't think welcoming families has ever been
looked at before...
IMPORTANT work.
Teachers
inviting parents in.
Principals
rethinking a few things.

Cookies and coffee.
The little things are IMPORTANT.
(Maybe a letter
to all new parents in the school...)

...thinking about
a smooth entry for parents.

As Evelyn and I try to make sense of welcoming families, we share so many wonders. Whose knowledge is valued? Who has a place and a voice on school landscapes? Who decides? Who owns the ground? Who is welcomed? Included? Who is an invited guest?



CHAPTER IV
PARENT ADVOCACY FOR INCREASED FUNDING FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

It is time now to explore a second band of color which separated out of my research experiences; to attend to the 'reds' of parent advocacy for increased funding for public education, both on and off the Gardenview landscape. Continuing to use multiple lenses to gain a "deeper noticing" (Bateson, 1994, p. 109) of the school landscape and parents' positioning in relation to it, I use lenses to see small and see big, and I attend to both 'trends and tendencies' and 'details and particularities' by looking short and looking long.

On the Gardenview Landscape

Since I began to write about seeing big and seeing small, I've started to think about other ways of seeing too. Have you ever taken a long, hard look at something? Or just a quick look? They are both common ways of seeing, aren't they? Yet, they serve different purposes. They open us to different perspectives, in the same way seeing big and seeing small do.

> Concentration is too precious to belittle. I know that if I look very narrowly and hard at anything I am likely to see something new—like the life between the grass stems that only becomes visible after moments of staring. Softening that concentration is also important—I've heard that the best way to catch the movement of falling stars is at the edge of vision. (Bateson, 1994, pp. 103-104)

We were driving north through Montana late last December, returning home from our Christmas holiday. The weather was unseasonably warm and there was no snow in sight. The sun was beating down brightly on the bare fields and on the dry pavement stretching in front of us. Glancing up from the novel I was reading to the boys, I caught sight of a range of mountains off in the distance. Deciding to take a break from reading to concentrate on the scenery, I put the book down and settled myself so that I could gaze comfortably out the window. As I fixed my eyes on the far away mountains, partly obscured behind haze, they began to shimmer in the bright sunlight. As I continued to watch, the shimmering mountains seemed to move and then suddenly they disappeared! The mountains were not mountains at all but a mirage, an optical illusion. When I had taken a quick look, a soft look, I saw a mountain range. When I took a longer look, a concentrated look, I saw a mirage.

Like seeing small and seeing big, we can 'look short' and 'look long.' They give us more ways of seeing—more ways of attending. Bateson (1994) writes:

> Attention involves mobilizing mental capacities to function adaptively in a given situation. Just as situations vary, so do styles of attention. …We can only deal with…things if we have multiple patterns of attention. (p. 97, p. 105)

Seeing small and seeing big are lenses that help us think about what we attend to. Seeing small enables us to see trends and tendencies, patterns and regularities—like the aerial view of the quilted landscape of Alberta. Seeing big enables us to see details and specificity, particularities and complexities—like the intimate richness of the buttercups and wild roses that grow on the land. Looking short and looking long help us think about how we attend. When I glanced up from the book I was reading, when I looked short, I formed an impression of a range of mountains on the distant horizon. Given Montana's rocky terrain, I saw something I expected to see. When I took the time to gaze uninterrupted at the scenery, to look long, I saw something new— a mirage, an optical illusion created by the play of light. I saw something that surprised me. In looking short, we capture expected images and impressions. In looking long, we see something new.

> …to compose lives of grace we need to learn an artful and aesthetic pattern of attention to the environment of those lives, attention that turns and turns again, embracing nature in all its diversity and other persons with all their potentials. We need a broader vision, to match the world in which we act with an image that includes the forest and the trees, the baby and the bathwater. (pp. 109-110)

I have another pile of photos to share. They are photos of parent advocacy for increased funding for public education. As I share the snapshots and tell the stories that surround them, I will attend to them in a way that turns them and turns them again. I'd like to look at them short. I'd like to look at them long. I'd like to see them small. I'd like to see them big. I'd like to attend to them in multiple ways.

Snapshots

> *The newly elected school trustee sits at a round table in the library. Seated with her are Evelyn, the school principal, and Kris, the school council chair. Surrounding tables are filled with parents, faces attentive and serious, engaged in conversation. Copies of a letter, Parent Power, are visible on all the tables.*
>
> *Evelyn sits at the desk in her office, her glasses perched on her nose and a pencil in her hand. Her desktop is covered with pieces of paper seemingly pulled from a thick blue file folder spread open before her. While she reads from the paper held in one hand, her other hand is poised over a lined pad of paper, the top sheet partially filled with words and numbers. A calculator rests just inches away from her hand.*
>
> *A small group of parents are seated informally around the table in the staffroom. Evelyn is with them. Cups of coffee rest in front of them. The clock on the wall behind them reads 8:10 p.m. The looks on their faces are animated and their body posture reflects how engaged they are in their conversation. Copies of Evelyn's Learning Resource Acquisition Plan and the financial statement of the Fundraising Association lay on the table between them. Kris is hurriedly making notes as they talk.*

Memorybank Movie

I've clustered this group of photos because they speak to parents' positioning at

Gardenview as advocates for public education. When I first met with Kris, the chair of the school council, in November, 1998, she said her goals for the year were threefold: to strengthen parents' feelings of being part of a community, to put a parent volunteer system in place, and to enhance the level of communication with parents about school council activities (field notes, November 27, 1998). Kris's goals reflect the kinds of endeavors school councils so frequently undertake (Benson, 1999); they reflect endeavors expected of a school council. When we met again at the end of her year as chair, to reflect on the activities of the school council, Kris said the surprise for her during the year was the prominent place lobbying came to occupy on the school council agenda and how, in effect, it became a new goal of the council (taped conversation, September 1, 1999). It's interesting how the perspective of the school council shifted. No longer were they just looking short, attending to the expected. They were also looking long, attending to the surprise of 'the play of light.'

While Honorable Gary Mar, Minister of Education, visited Gardenview in October, 1998 to kick off Read In Week and Dr. Roger Palmer, Deputy Minister of Education, engaged in conversation with parents about educational issues at a school council meeting in November, 1998, Kris believed it was only when their newly elected school trustee challenged them to get involved in the issue of underfunding of public education that their engagement as advocates truly began. At a school council meeting in December, 1998, their trustee expressed her belief that it will be parents and school councils who influence government, rather than trustees, school board administration or principals, and she challenged them to use their influence. Providing them with a letter she had written entitled Parent Power, she invited them to use points from her letter to draft their own letters to government members, voicing concerns about educational issues of great importance to them (field notes, December 2, 1998).

From that point on, parent advocacy for increased funding of public education became a focal point in activities and discussions of the school council. It was then they began looking long. If we quickly flip through minutes of their meetings, you'll see what I mean.

January, 1999

Kris shared the "parent power" letter she wrote in December on behalf of the school council and the response she received from Minister of Education Gary Mar. She encouraged other parents to write.

February, 1999

Kris shared the second letter she wrote, in response to the Minister's reply. After discussion, parents agreed to wait on sending this letter and to first try to organize an opportunity to speak with Honorable Gary Mar in person.

March, 1999

Kris shared the correspondence she received from their MLA to her "parent power" letter, as well as an invitation to school council chairs and principals to meet with him on March 12th, the day after the provincial government's budget announcement.

Another parent who wrote a "parent power" letter to government representatives read a piece from the letter of response she received from their MLA.

Parents recommended that the response Kris wrote earlier to the Minister of Education's letter no longer be held but be mailed.

Kris indicated that a meeting of school council chairs in the area was scheduled for March 9th regarding lobbying the government for increased funding for education. She said she planned to attend and invited other interested parents to join her.

Kris asked if anyone was planning to attend the advocacy forum being held at Crestwood School on March 8th featuring Rich Vavone, government affairs reporter, as keynote speaker.

April, 1999

A meeting of the executive of the school council was held to discuss how to effectively use their time with their MLA at their upcoming town hall meeting.

At the school council meeting, the MLA addressed parents and responded to the questions and concerns which they raised.

Kris informed parents that the next meeting of school council chairs in their area regarding lobbying the government for increased educational funding was scheduled for April 20th.

Kris asked parents to consider the establishment of a Gardenview political action committee to write letters, attend meetings, and stay informed about advocacy issues and events as time prohibited her from maintaining this role and fulfilling her other responsibilities as chair of the school council.

May, 1999

At the school council meeting, Kris circulated to parents the Whitemud Coalition of Schools report prepared for the Honorable David Hancock, MLA for Edmonton Whitemud.

Kris shared information about the Parents Advocating for Children and Teachers (PACT) picnic to be held at the Lymburn School grounds on June 13th.

You see how engaged parents became in their work as advocates. The snapshots all seem to capture points significant to the advocacy work at Gardenview. The advocacy events weren't planned but were sparked by their school trustee's visit and then they continued to unfold as time directed. Looking long, parents attended to the surprise of this advocacy 'play of light.' The first snapshot captures one turning point—the school council meeting where parents were reading and discussing the "parent power" letter drafted by their trustee. The second snapshot, the one of Evelyn working at her desk, captures another significant piece of the advocacy story at Gardenview.

Evelyn first developed the Learning Resource Acquisition Plan in the 1996/97 school year as a three year plan to enable "Professional staff, in collaboration with parents, to put into place highly effective and current learning resources which meet the diverse learning needs of students attending [Gardenview] School" (Learning Resource Acquisition Plan, undated). In the second snapshot, you get a glimpse of Evelyn working to extend the plan through to the year 2000/2001, identifying resource needs which would support teaching and learning within newly mandated curriculum areas, within the program of studies for Information and Communication Technology, and within all other curriculum areas.

The Learning Resource Acquisition Plan became a focal point in conversations at Gardenview about parent advocacy for increased funding for public education because it documented both the amount of money expended from school funds and the amount of money parents fundraised to purchase core curriculum materials.

While the government's stance continued to be one that supported fundraising for extra-curricular resources and activities only (letter from Honorable Gary Mar, Minister of Education, January 5,1999), the parents of Gardenview continued to return to this Learning Resource Acquisition Plan to demonstrate that fundraising had become necessary to support the purchase of core curriculum materials, and was no longer a luxury but a necessity.

In the third snapshot, some of the executive members of the school council were meeting with Evelyn in the staffroom one evening to prepare for an upcoming school council meeting with their MLA. As they reviewed their concerns about the funding of public education, they determined that rather than just raising issues they would like to develop a strategy which would enable their MLA to see the funding issues through parents' eyes. As they returned again and again to issues of class size, fundraising and the need for resources to support new curriculum mandates, they became excited about how clearly they could demonstrate their situation if they used both the school's Learning Resource Acquisition Plan and the financial statement of their Fundraising Association. After a great deal of animated conversation, they decided that at the school council meeting, with their MLA present, they would first have Evelyn talk through the Learning Resource Acquisition Plan, detailing resources purchased to date and further resources the school would like to purchase. They would then have Patrick, a member of Gardenview's Fundraising Association executive, talk through their financial statement, detailing how much money had been raised and how much money could be allocated toward the purchase of these resources. They believed that by demonstrating the total cost of the plan for the next three years would reach $95,325 and by having Patrick present Gardenview with the available fundraised dollars of $19,000, their MLA would have a much more concrete and detailed picture of their financial realities.

Dear Mr. Blueberry

It was as I drove home from this meeting that I thought about the children's book Dear Mr. Blueberry (James, 1991) and about the exchange of letters within it between a little girl Emily and her teacher Mr. Blueberry. Emily, looking long, sees something new—a whale in her pond. Seeing big, she seeks advice from Mr. Blueberry so that she can attend to its needs and particularities. Mr. Blueberry, looking short, insists the unexpected is not possible—a whale can't live in a pond. Seeing small, he shares his knowledge of patterns and regularities of whales to convince her to accept the expected. The story begins:

> Dear Mr. Blueberry,
>
> I love whales very much and I think I saw one in my pond today. Please send me some information on whales, as I think he might be hurt.
>
> Love,
> Emily

Mr. Blueberry responds:

> Dear Emily,
>
> Here are some details about whales. I don't think you'll find it was a whale you saw, because whales don't live in ponds, but in salt water.
>
> Yours sincerely
> Your teacher,
> Mr. Blueberry

It struck me how much the exchange between parents and government representatives paralleled the exchange between Emily and Mr. Blueberry. No matter how Mr. Blueberry tried to convince Emily that a whale couldn't be living in her pond, Emily stuck fast to her belief in the presence of the whale and continued determinedly to ask how she could best take care of him. Throughout the long interchange between parents at Gardenview School and government representatives, the parents stuck fast to their belief that public education is underfunded and continued determinedly to look for ways to lobby for increased funding for their children's education, no matter how many times they were told there was no more money available for education or that the priorities of Albertans rested in other areas. Intrigued by this parallel, I created my own version of Dear Mr. Blueberry. In my version, Mr. Blueberry is a government representative, constructed from a compilation of data from letters, news releases and field notes arising out of school council meetings and correspondence from many sources. Emily is a parent, representative of any and all parents at Gardenview who joined in the advocacy discussions, lobbying for more money for public education. As I constructed their interchanges, I tried to honor the structure, phrasing, tone and overall feel of the original Dear Mr. Blueberry story.

Here it is. It gives a sense of the details of Gardenview parents' advocacy. Then we can talk further about parents' positioning as advocates for public education using our multiple patterns of attention.

Dear Mr. Blueberry,

I love my children very much and as I go to volunteer at their school each day I become concerned about the size of their classes and about resources that are not available to them. Please send me some information on the funding of public education as I think their education may be suffering.

Warmly—A concerned parent,
Emily

Dear Emily,

Here are some details about the funding of public education. I don't think you'll find your children's education is suffering because, "as you know, the achievement results of children in this province are second to none–both in breadth and depth,"[4] and because the amount of money spent on education "will be increased to almost $3.4 billion by 2000/2001–for a total increase of $488 million or 17 per cent in four years."[5]

Yours sincerely
Your government representative,

Mr. Blueberry

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[4] Field notes from presentation by Dr. Roger Palmer, then Deputy Minister of Education, at Gardenview School Council Meeting, November 19, 1998

[5] Letter from Honorable Gary Mar, then Minister of Education, to chair of Gardenview School Council, dated Jan. 5/99

Dear Mr. Blueberry,

I really appreciate the increased expenditure in education and I know that every dollar helps. I am concerned though that changes in the curriculum at the elementary level have been mandated in math, science and language arts, yet corresponding allocations have not been made to enable schools to purchase new supporting resources or to inservice their professional staff. As a result, I am increasingly engaged in fundraising activities to generate money to purchase core curriculum materials.

Do you think fundraising should be necessary "to bridge the financial gap and to ensure the best education for [my] children"[6]?

Warmly

Yet still concerned,

Emily

Dear Emily,

Please don't fundraise any more for core curriculum materials. I really won't be pleased. "Fund-raising is appropriate to provide for the 'extras' that school staff and parents want, such as additional playground equipment, sports uniforms, etc."

I'm afraid "there should not be a need for fund-raising to pay for basic instructional resources. If this is happening at [Gardenview], I encourage you to talk to your principal and school board about how funding is being allocated."[7]

Yours sincerely,

Mr. Blueberry

Dear Mr. Blueberry,

Today I am very happy because I saw my children's Power Point presentations at school and they were quite amazing. While I was at school, their teachers said the newly mandated Information and Communication Technology Program of Studies is now out. At my children's school, the ratio of computers to children is one to eight. That is because our fundraising association provided $20,300 in financial support to Gardenview in 1996/97 and $46,000 in financial support in 1997/98, years when major computer purchases were being made.[8] Is the Alberta Learning standard still one computer for every five students in a school?

Warmly,

Emily

P.S. If I should not be fundraising for basic instructional resources how can my children's school lower its ratio of computers from one to eight to one to five?

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[6] Letter from Kris, chair of Gardenview School Council to Honorable Gary Mar, then Minister of Education, dated December 14, 1998

[7] Letter from Honorable Gary Mar, then Minister of Education, to Gardenview School Council Chair, dated Jan. 5, 1999

[8] Gardenview School's Learning Resource Acquisition Plan, presentation at school council meeting, January, 1999

Dear Emily,

You are right, the costs of technology are high as are the costs of maintenance and upgrading. However, I must tell you that $40 per child per year was allocated to your school for three consecutive years, 1996-1999, to assist with the implementation of your school's technology plan.

Yours sincerely,

Mr. Blueberry

P.S. Perhaps your school will also need to utilize further funds from the $3860 per pupil basic instruction grant which your school board receives.[9]

Dear Mr. Blueberry,

Last night I read your letter to my children's principal. Afterward she showed me the school's Learning Resource Acquisition Plan and worked through the numbers with me. The $40 per child which was allocated, given the size of Gardenview School, would allow the purchase of twenty computers, reaching a ratio of one computer for every sixteen children. The school has purchased forty nine computers to get to our current ratio of one computer for every eight children. Another $60,000 would have to be expended to get to the Alberta Learning standard of one to five.[10]

Our principal said that "without the support of our School Council and school community, we would not have been able to achieve the goals set for the acquisition of current and enriched learning resources, which are purchased to enhance and make current what is presently in place." She believes "[t]he quality of the learning resources [educators] place in the hands of our [children] is critical to their academic advancement and achievement. The advantage to [our] children lies in being able to access quality resources today rather than waiting two or three years to acquire them."[11]

What do you think?

Warmly

Yet still concerned,

Emily

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[9] Letter from Honorable Gary Mar, Minister of Education, to Gardenview's School Council Chair, dated January 5, 1999

[10] Presentation by Evelyn, principal of Gardenview, at School Council Meeting, April 13, 1999

[11] Gardenview School's Learning Resource Acquisition Plan, January, 1999

Dear Emily,

I must point out to you "Government's first priority is the young people of our province. That is why we called our reinvestment plan for education, *First things first ...our children*, ensuring that the money we spend on education focuses directly on student needs.

...Government continues to assess the level of funding provided to school boards as part of the provincial budget planning process.... Government will continue to work with all education stakeholders to ensure that young Albertans receive the education they need and that their parents want for them."[12]

As I wrote earlier, over the four years from 1997-2001, education spending will increase by seventeen per cent. At this time, there is no other money for education. I am sorry to disappoint you.

Yours sincerely,

Mr. Blueberry

Dear Mr. Blueberry,

Tonight I'm a little sad. I received your letter and I recognize that I will have to continue to advocate as a parent for the funding of public education. I will continue to write letters to you and your government colleagues. I will continue to invite you to our school council meetings so that we can talk together about life in elementary classrooms—where numbers are high and student needs are diverse, where curriculum is new and resources are needed, where access to technology for children is still limited. I will write again.

Still concerned,

Emily

Dear Emily,

Please don't be too sad, it really is impossible for government to put more money in education at the moment. Perhaps if you would like to continue to create public discussion around increased funding for public education, not just with me or other government members but with all members of society, you will have success with your advocacy. It is important to note that seventy percent of voters do not have children in schools. It is also important to note that of the 78,000 responses the government received to their November/December 1998 *Talk it up. Talk it out.* survey of Albertans regarding spending priorities, paying down the debt had the highest importance rating, followed by reducing taxes and then increasing priority spending, which would include increased funding for areas such as health care and education.[13]

There is only so much money. That doesn't mean that advocacy can't create a shift in emphasis on spending priorities.

Yours sincerely,

Mr. Blueberry

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[12] Letter from Honorable Gary Mar, then Minister of Education, to Gardenview's School Council Chair, dated Jan. 5/99

[13] Alberta Treasury News Release, January 22, 1999. Talk it up. Talk it out. survey results.

Dear Mr. Blueberry,

It's been the happiest day! I just heard on the news that a $151 million one-time grant has just been unveiled by Learning Minister Dr. Lyle Oberg to "allow school boards to eliminate accumulated deficits, as well as reward those school boards that have recorded balanced budgets."[14]

I talked to my children's school principal about it and she smiled! I told her I thought it was interesting that the government's reinvestment plan for education is called First things first... our children, the same message as our school motto, "Children first." I told her I appreciate how much she cares for my children, and how much their teachers do and, I hope you don't mind, I said I believe you care for them too.

Warmly,

Emily (and my children)

Looking Beyond the Images

In looking beyond the images, I am attempting to attend more deeply and more fully, to attend in multiple ways. Bateson believes "that if we can learn a deeper noticing of the world around us, this will be the basis of effective concern" (1994, p. 109). It is with this intent of effective concern that I look long and look short, and see big and see small, the images of parent advocacy at Gardenview.

Looking Short

I am intrigued by the involvement of Gardenview parents in advocating for increased funding for public education. While it was not an expected goal of the school council at the beginning of the year, it became a new and significant activity in which the council was involved. As we saw when we glanced quickly at the school council agendas and minutes of the meetings, parent advocacy began to appear each month and in ever increasing and diverse ways.

Looking short, forming an initial impression, I have to wonder if this is a change in positioning for parents in relation to the school landscape. Remember very early in our conversation when we talked about the kinds of things parents are typically involved in within a school and how McGilp & Michael (1994) categorize those positions as "audience, spectators, fund raisers, aides and organizers" (p. 2)? It's easy to see that advocacy, with parents' active engagement in meetings, forums, and letter writing, doesn't fall into the positions of audience or spectator. It's also easy to see that while frustration with having to be a fund raiser to purchase curriculum resources is a point of discussion in the parent advocacy campaign, fund raising and advocacy remain distinct activities. Neither does advocacy fall into the typical activities of a parent aide who reads with children, mixes paint, laminates or photocopies or into the typical activities of a parent organizer who plans the hot lunch days or special events such as breakfast with Santa or the grade six farewell. My initial impression causes me to wonder if parent advocacy is a new positioning for parents, one uniquely different from the typical positionings of parents on the school landscape.

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[14] News Release: Alberta School Boards to Receive One-Time Grant, August 31, 1999

Seeing Big

Seeing big, seeing the details and particularities of this parent advocacy, I again have to wonder if this is a change of positioning for parents in relation to the school landscape. Are knowledge, voice and decision-making no longer resting solely with educators? Are parents finding a place for their knowledge, voice, and participation in decision-making in this advocacy campaign?

At the January, 1999 school council meeting, when Kris shared the response she received from Honorable Gary Mar, Minister of Education, to the 'parent power' letter she had written, she commented on how she felt her letter had been read and acknowledged (field notes, January 19, 1999). Kris's comment reflects her feelings of having a voice in the funding debate—a voice that is potentially influential. In another advocacy conversation at the March school council meeting, commenting on the response another parent received from their MLA to her 'parent power' letter, Kris stated, "Getting told to go to our principal for an explanation of our school's allocation assumes that our principal dictates to us what should happen with funds" (field notes, March 4, 1999). Here Kris is reflecting on the MLA's lack of recognition of the part parents play in budget decisions at the school level and of a shift away from a hierarchical decision-making model at Gardenview.

Later in that same conversation, Patrick, another parent, spoke up and said, "There was a book referred to on CBC radio regarding actual expenditures for education. I want to get educated and be intelligent in our support for increased funding for education" (field notes, March 4, 1999). Patrick is not accepting the numbers and statistics being bandied about in the advocacy debate but is taking responsibility for being a well-informed and knowledgeable advocate. In an April meeting, when the school council executive was meeting to prepare for their upcoming school council town hall meeting with their MLA, Patrick spoke up once again, "The argument we present for increased funding shouldn't just be financial. It must be educational. It must be moral." Another parent agreed with him, "It's more than just about money. It's about the quality of life for families. I'm not just fundraising for one school—I have kids in four schools. Working parents, moms and dads, feel guilty because they either take more time away from their kids or they don't help fundraise. Stay at home parents are stretched too thin" (field notes, April 8, 1999). Both parents are bringing their parent knowledge into this conversation, combining what they know about advocacy issues from an intellectual perspective with what they know about them from their lived experience. Seeing big, I wonder if parent advocacy is a new positioning for parents, one that provides a space for them to share their knowledge, have a voice, and participate in decision-making.

Seeing Small

When we see small, we see through the lens of a system. We move away from the intimate details of the parent conversations and the concreteness of their monthly school council meetings to take an 'aerial view' of the larger picture. Seeing small, taking the perspective of a system, I have to wonder if, in actuality, parent advocacy is not changing parents' positioning in relation to the school landscape at all but instead is maintaining the old story of parents serving the school's/the school district's agenda.

On January 12, 1999 the Edmonton Public School Board approved their district priorities for 1999-2002. One of the five priorities includes: to increase levels of public support and funding for public education. With the establishment of this new priority came the development of "A Framework for Public Education Advocacy." Each month a camera-ready bulletin was forwarded to schools, enabling the principal to share the public education advocacy information with staff, with parents, and with community members. While not always identical in format, the bulletin generally includes sections such as: What are the issues?, Quick Facts, What are the Key Messages?, Basic Tenets of Advocacy, Samples of Existing Opportunities, Samples of Emerging Opportunities, Samples of Created Opportunities. Under these lists of opportunities for "positioning positive advocacy messages" are recommendations such as: encourage school council to discuss the issue of public education underfunding and what can be done, request MLAs to speak at school meetings, launch an advocacy campaign at the school encouraging parents to contact MLAs, speak to parents about the impact of underfunding in planning for the next school budget, presentations by parents at Community League (A Framework for Public Education Advocacy, Numbers 1-5). Reading these suggested opportunities, I begin to question my initial impression that parent advocacy is a new and unique positioning of parents on the school landscape. I begin to question whether knowledge, voice, and decision-making do rest with parents as well as educators. Seeing small, I see an agenda being set by a school district and being reinforced by trustees and principals.

Returning to my conversation with Kris, when she was reflecting on her year as chair of the school council, I come back to her words about "all the lobbying" being the surprise for her that year.

> From the December meeting that [our school trustee] attended and kicked it off, we actually got people who did write letters. We started correspondence and we started a political flavor to our council. [Our school trustee] is the first to call us to action and say you have a role to play. That got the political ball rolling. (taped conversation, September 1, 1999)

I remember the school trustee's words too, "The government isn't going to listen to trustees, to school board administrators or to principals. The government is going to listen to school councils" (field notes, December 2, 1998).

This message was reinforced by Evelyn, the school principal, as well:

> I think there's more of a political role for parents now than there was maybe a couple of years ago when we were looking at learning resources and student learning and those kinds of things. I think parents recognize now that it's a political situation and if parents don't play an active role with the government then we could end up not having appropriate resources and class sizes would be large. (taped conversation, March 3, 1999)

Seeing small, I see an agenda being set by a school district and being reinforced by trustees and principals. Seeing small, I begin to wonder if parent advocacy is just another example of parents serving the school's/school district's agenda.

Looking Long

In looking long at Edmonton Public School's priority "to increase levels of public support and funding for public education," I decided to look up the word support in my dictionary. The definition read, "Lend assistance or countenance to, back up, second, further; speak in favor of" (The Concise Oxford Dictionary, p. 1160). Thinking further about the connection between support and advocacy, I then looked up the words advocacy and advocate. Advocacy is defined as "function of an advocate; pleading in support of" (p. 16) while advocate is said to be "one who pleads for another; one who speaks in favour of" (p. 16). Both support and advocate have the same definition—to speak in favor of. I'm intrigued by these definitions because they help me think about whether "speak[ing] in favor of…," in this case increased funding for public education, is a change in positioning of parents or just another version of the old story of parents serving the school's/school district's agenda. Does parent advocacy add something more to or extend in some way typical parent involvement?

In her study of school and parent councils, Benson examines the words involvement and participation.

> The terms involvement and participation are often used inter-changeably and have occurred that way throughout this study. The terms, however, may imply important differences (Beare, 1993). "Involvement" comes from

> the Latin, "involvere," which means "to roll into" and by extension implies wrapping up or enveloping parents somehow into the system. "The implication in the word is that the person 'involved' is co-opted, brought into the act by another party" (p. 207). The word "participation," on the other hand, implies that parents actually "have a part in." "Thus a participant has a right to be included, whereas someone who is involved is there by invitation" (p. 207).
>
> The fundamental question asked by Beare is whether parents should be included as a part of the life of the school because it is convenient or useful to have them there, or whether they are there "by right, so much a part of the action that it is impossible to exclude them" (p. 207). (Benson, 1999, p. 48)

When I think long about those words "there by invitation," I think again of hospitality. Are educators who are inviting parents in being hospitable? In being hospitable, are they then the hosts? As hosts, do they decide who can play, and when, and where, and under what conditions? Do they get to be the "boss"? As "boss," do they own the ground? Do they get to set the agenda?

Are parents then the invited guests?

Or, are they rightful participants? **Who decides?**

Off the Gardenview Landscape

Snapshots

> *Dianne Williamson sits in an armchair in her living room. The telephone rests on one arm of her chair, her daytimer on the other. Natural light streams into the area from the dining room windows just beyond her, brightening and warming the space. The family's cockatiel stands behind Dianne's head on the padded back of her chair and their cocker spaniel lays stretched out in the sunlight near her feet. A pitcher of lemonade and a freshly baked cake can be seen on the coffee table in front of her.*

The green field sprawls outward from its L-shaped border of city streets up to a large school and then beyond into the distance. A stage, set up on the tarmac beside the school, has been readied for an upcoming event with a row of chairs arranged along its length and a podium placed prominently toward the front. A large yellow banner mounted to the school wall flaps in the breeze, reflecting the brilliant sunshine of the day onto the surface of the stage. On the grassy area in the foreground, children play carnival games in the many booths, while adults assist them and cheer them on.

Rows of chairs in Earl Buxton's school gymnasium are filled with approximately 120 parents and educators from schools which form the Whitemud Coalition of Schools. As one of the school council chairpersons addresses the audience, David Hancock, MLA for the Edmonton Whitemud constituency, sits in the front row listening intently, making rapid notes on a small notepad.

Memorybank Movie

These shots, too, all capture parent advocacy for increased funding for public education—but advocacy occurring off the Gardenview landscape. As Kris began to share information about parent advocacy events taking place elsewhere, as these same events became a topic for discussion at school council meetings I attended as Cohen's mom, as articles began appearing in the newspapers, I decided to step out of the Gardenview parade at times to attend to some of these events—to watch and to listen, to try and broaden and deepen my understanding of this parent advocacy movement that seemed to be gathering ever-increasing momentum.

One of the first people I met with was Dianne Williamson, founder of the advocacy group PACT (Parents Advocating for Children and Teachers). Dianne had made a visit to the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development at the University of Alberta to speak about her group's advocacy work and to garner support for parents' efforts. During her conversation with Dr. Clandinin, Dianne made the statement, "We're starting a revolution!" Intrigued by these words and what a "revolution" could mean for the positioning of parents in relation to school landscapes, I called and set up a taped conversation with Dianne.

That's Dianne in this first photo. It's interesting to note the telephone and the agenda book on the arm of her chair. I don't know how many times the phone rang that morning. Between being a wife and mother, running her bed and breakfast, working as a volunteer at her daughter's school, and now heading PACT, her life is obviously full with the multiple demands made on her time. Nevertheless, she welcomed me warmly into her home with lemonade and fresh-baked cake and we settled comfortably into her living room for a conversation.

Curious about her statement to Dr. Clandinin, I asked her to tell me about the "revolution" being started. Dianne explained her use of the term by saying:

> In every revolution there's an elite structure who think they know best—a power elite who are not listening to the people. In every revolution, there's also a populace. A lot of people are involved who are tied together by a genuine interest in an issue; an interest which spans political affiliation, race, religion and so on. In this instance, the power elite are political structures at a provincial level, school boards, Alberta Learning, and other organizations with a vested interest in education. The people involved, the populace, are those who are seeing the collateral damage in schools which is occurring because of a lack of funding and a lack of imagination. They are asking those in the elite power structures, "By what right do you shortchange us with our own money?" (taped conversation, April 12, 1999)

Developing a sense of her metaphor of a revolution, I asked her to tell me more about the populace seeking a voice.

> In our advocacy group, needless to say, it's moms and we talk. We talk about what specifically we want and what our children are like, what our children need, what our teachers are like, about our experiences. We are, in

> fact, in 1999 the consumers. And let nobody make a mistake. This is a consumer-driven society. It might not have been 100 years ago. It might not even have been acknowledged fifty years ago, but we are the consumers of the education system. And more sophisticated.

Picturing Dianne as a mom, as a consumer of the education system was not difficult. Yet still wondering what prompted her to take a lead role in this advocacy movement, I asked her to tell me more about her own involvement.

> When I decided to do the rally at Lymburn, I thought , "Okay. I'm a firm believer, if you want to bitch you've either got to vote or you've got to participate." You've got to own part of it and then you can whine about it. So I thought, "Okay, I'll do this rally." Then I can sit back and legitimately say, "This is right, this is wrong. This is right, this is wrong." But now that I've done it, it's so obvious I can't [sit back]. It has to carry on. It has to carry on 'til the changes are actually done. I am going to get the change I want. Period. (taped conversation, April 12, 1999)

At the time of this conversation, the rally at Lymburn on March 21, 1999 was behind Dianne and she was already heavily involved in planning the PACT Picnic scheduled for June 13, 1999. It's an image of that picnic that you can see in the second photograph I showed you. Right from the beginning, Dianne imagined the picnic as a carnival. She planned it for families, with food and fun, with games and music—and with information for the parents. That's what all those areas are on the grass—they're carnival games for the kids. And the stage is set up in a prominent place against the wall of the school so those speaking will be seen and heard throughout the crowd.

Dianne continues to say her work is about information. She believes strongly that "knowledge is power" (telephone conversation, June 14, 2000). That's why PACT put together a Fact Sheet, why they continue to talk with government representatives, school board members, educators, and members of organizations such as the Alberta Teachers' Association, the Alberta School Boards' Association and the Canadian Association of School Superintendents. It's why they continue to work to "politicize parents" (taped conversation, April 12, 1999). While there are issues surrounding education, Dianne is convinced that most parents don't even know what the issues are. She believes that because barriers to information exist within schools, because there are school issues not talked about with parents, and because there just are not enough opportunities for meaningful conversations between parents and educators, there is a need to create both an awareness of educational issues and an opportunity to talk about them (telephone conversation, June 14, 2000).

Continuing to seek information and to share that information with parents, further PACT activities include a forum held on October 25, 1999 and a survey forwarded to over 1700 schools in the province of Alberta in April, 2000 to discover "How Much is Enough? To Educate All Children Well." The results of the survey will be discussed with provincial MLA's at a PACT "Let's Talk" Session to be held on October 14, 2000. PACT continues to focus their information seeking and sharing around their motto, "Educating all children well." Dianne feels since no one can say, "I don't believe in that," everyone must ask, "What does that mean?" It's in the asking of the question and in the multitude of responses to it, from the varied and diverse stakeholders, that the revolution gains voice.

The third picture? No, that's not another PACT event. That was a gathering of the Whitemud Coalition of Schools, a group of sixteen public and Catholic schools situated in the Edmonton Whitemud constituency. That was another parent advocacy event that I attended off the Gardenview School landscape. On April 6, 1999 school council chairs from each of the sixteen schools made presentations of "facts, figures and requests" to their MLA, The Honorable David Hancock. After the presentations, Minister Hancock responded and then took questions from the floor. All the chairs set out in the gym were filled with parents and educators and the time was filled with an intense two and a quarter hours of presentations and interchanges between the Minister and participants. The impact of that evening came in the specifics shared by each school representative—what the actual school budget dollars meant in regard to staffing reductions, program reductions, size of classes, limitations to resource and supplies purchasing, and implications for fundraising. Indeed, Minister Hancock responded to the presentations by saying what he found powerful was how school council chairs went beyond a call for more money to targeting key questions that need to be asked and to looking at key areas that need to be addressed (field notes, April 6, 1999). It seems that Dianne has something when she says this parent advocacy movement, this revolution, is about information and about politicizing parents.

Up until very recently, school deficits were not talked about openly. Principals worried that a deficit would be perceived to be a reflection of their abilities as a financial manager, as a sound decision-maker. They were forced to tell cover stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995), stories of confidence about their budgeting decisions, about the school's financial position, about decisions being made that influenced that financial position. The gathering of the Whitemud Coalition of Schools was an opportunity to sweep away the cover stories, to move away from being silent and alone to speaking out with a unified voice.

At the end of the evening, sharing thoughts and perceptions about the meeting, a principal friend said,

> We went from four months ago, it wasn't okay to have a deficit and we certainly didn't talk about it publicly, to now. We're all saying we have a deficit and we're putting it on the table and we're talking about it and we're saying, listen, public education is underfunded. So, it's an amazing shift in a short period of time. (field notes, April 6, 1999)

It was the parents, generally the school council chairs, who shared the school's budget information that evening—who said how many teachers or support staff their school would be losing, how large the class sizes would be, what their deficit position was. Dianne is right, the information is no longer solely in the hands of the educators. Parents are becoming politicized.

The chairperson for the evening stated the Whitemud Coalition's purpose is "to ensure high quality public education for all students" (field notes, April 6, 1999). It's interesting how PACT's motto aligns with this purpose and how the messages resonate with and reinforce one another. It's interesting too how other advocacy groups have been formed, groups such as Save our Schools (SOS), North East Coalition (NEC), Advocate Communicate Educate (ACE), Save Public Education—Act for Kids (SPEAK), and how other events have taken place, events such as a forum hosted by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, a rally at the Legislative building, and forums at Dan Knott, Crestwood and Kirkness Schools (telephone conversation with Dianne Williamson, June 14, 2000). All with similar purposes, they talk together and support one another as they continue to advocate.

The parade is definitely in motion, isn't it? Each group in the parade—PACT, SOS, NEC, and so on—

> has a particular place and a particular set of stories being lived out at any particular time. [Their] influence in the landscape, in the parade, is uncertain. We cannot easily anticipate how [their] presence, [their] innovations, [their] stories, will influence other stories. The parade proceeds whether we wish it to or not. (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998a, p. 161)

Looking Beyond the Images

In thinking about this present parent advocacy, I'm drawn backward in time to a previous advocacy movement, a former parade, and I'm drawn forward in time to imagining what the future of this current movement may hold, to where the advocacy for increased funding for public education parade may lead us, to what possibilities it may create. In moving backward to the 1960's and 1970's to attend to the parent advocacy which surrounded the establishment of kindergartens as part of our public education system, I'm drawn forward to attend to how that experience may help us anticipate where this new advocacy parade may lead us.

Wisniewski (1989) provides us with a thorough picture of the public debate which surrounded the demand for government funding of kindergarten programs and their inclusion in the education system. She explains that with the increasing trend of two-income families, parents had a real interest in quality preschool programs in which to enrol their children. Because of the shortage of programs available, various women's organizations organized community kindergartens which were both funded and operated by members of the community. Parents saw these kindergarten programs as necessary to meet the preschool needs of their children, but a temporary measure nonetheless. With about twenty such co-operatives operating in Edmonton by 1972, parents formed an association, the Parent Co-operative Kindergarten Association of Greater Edmonton (PCKA), with the long term goal of advocating for government funded kindergartens within the public school system. Their intensive lobbying, including meetings with MLAs, participation in open-line radio shows, television appearances, press releases of their activities and an intensive flow of letters to government officials, had a significant part to play in the government's 1973 decision to publicly fund early childhood services.

Because parents had been running community kindergartens, they insisted they had a great deal to contribute to public kindergartens and that parental involvement needed to be an integral element of kindergarten programs. The positioning of parents in relation to kindergarten can be seen in the philosophy, goals and program dimensions established by Early Childhood Services (ECS), a newly formed branch of the Department of Education. One of the seven principles upon which the ECS philosophy is founded reads "parents are primary agents in the child's development" (Alberta Education, 1984, p. 4). Their sixth goal statement reads, "To contribute to the involvement of parents in their children's education by encouraging participation in program development, implementation and evaluation" (p. 5). Further, specific policies and programs for parent involvement and parent education were established, with accompanying funds to support them (Wisniewski, 1989). In fact, it was legislated that "a parental commitment to participatory involvement [is] a requirement for approval and financial support for Early Childhood Services' programs (Howard, 1976). Local Advisory Committees (LACs) were formed, with a required majority membership by parents, first to develop program proposals requesting approval of a kindergarten program, then to engage in the establishment, development and administration of the program (Wisniewski, 1989). It is clear that parents' desire to be integrally positioned on the landscape of kindergartens was realized.

It's interesting to look further though, to attend to whether parents' positioning within optionally attended kindergarten programs influenced the positioning of parents in relation to the landscape of mandated schooling, from grade one onward. In 1986, we began to hear about articulation.

> Articulation is characterized by continuity in learning objectives, instructional practices, evaluation methods, program administration and the involvement of parents and community resource persons. (Alberta Education, 1986, p. 3)

Articulation became the focus of the first of the seven basic principles of Early Childhood Services' philosophy: "Human development is a continuous, sequential, interactive process through the articulation of ECS programs with elementary education" (p. 3). As Early Childhood Services merged with Alberta Education and the term 'articulation' came to be called 'program continuity,' Alberta Education issued its program continuity policy statement in 1988 (Lemieux, 1989).

As articulation gave way to program continuity, other things gave way as well. While parents continued to be mentioned in program continuity definitions and documents, the focus of discussion came to surround differing educational philosophies—the John Dewey versus Ralph Tyler debate. As principal of Julia Kiniski School from 1989-1992, I know the many conversations we had as a staff about program continuity centred on discussions of viewing curriculum as a continuum rather than a series of discrete graded boxes, of organizing for learning in ways that enabled students to be actively engaged in hands-on activities, of teaching and learning strategies such as centres, the use of manipulatives and co-operative learning groups. We did not talk about the involvement of parents in program planning and implementation. We did not talk about the involvement of parents at all. Neither did our colleagues in other schools in their discussions of program continuity.

So how do we make sense of the integral positioning of parents within kindergarten programs, resulting from the public advocacy parade, when we see parents positioned in the margins of 'real' school? Again, I think we have to return to our multiple patterns of attending. I think we have to attend to the story of parent advocacy for publicly funded kindergartens, attending in a way that turns the story and turns it again. I think we have to look at it short and I think we have to look at it long. I think we have to see it small and I think we have to see it big.

Looking Short

Looking short, we get a very hopeful image or impression of parents' positioning on the landscape of kindergartens. Attending to the shift from community kindergartens to school-based kindergartens, we see what we expect to see. We see the extensive involvement of parents being maintained as they work together with educators to establish and develop new kindergarten programs within school districts. As I mentioned when I retold Wisniewski's story of advocacy for publicly funded kindergartens, the positioning of parents was protected through the legislated requirement that parents be involved before funding would be granted. Early Childhood Services acknowledged parents as key players in their children's education, both at home and at school, through their philosophy and goal statements. By making money available for parent programs, they attested to the sincerity of their statements and their commitment to parent involvement.

Looking short, I continue to see the presence of Local Advisory Committees in kindergartens today. The image of parent positioning within kindergartens holds strong.

Seeing Big

Seeing big, seeing the details and particularities of the kindergarten advocacy, my impression of the integral positioning of parents on the kindergarten landscape is reinforced. There appears to be a place for the knowledge, voice, and decision-making of parents.

As I read about parents who were involved in establishing and running community kindergartens, I wonder how much their experiences may have been like mine with my children's preschool programs. All three of my boys attended a parent co-operative preschool program for four year olds. I think of the nights we spent meeting as a parent group, talking about programming, themes, activities, fieldtrips. I'm reminded of a conversation about parent conferences and how we all shared our thoughts and experiences as we decided on a process that honored our shared belief about celebrating children's successes. I think about the many jobs that needed to be done and how we all took responsibility for at least one of them. Using my experiences as a preschool parent to try and 'see big' parents' experiences of community kindergartens, I see how much parent knowledge they would have had. I see how much knowledge they would have garnered from developing and implementing their community kindergarten programs. Laying those images beside the legislation of parent involvement as a requirement for government funding of kindergartens and beside the statements in the Early Childhood Services philosophy, goals and program dimensions recognizing parents as key players in their children's education, it appears that educators and policy makers also saw and valued parents' knowledge, inviting them to continue to use that knowledge in the new kindergarten contexts.

As I read about parents who were involved in the establishment of Local Advisory Committees (LAC) and I see big, I see parents with a strong and articulate voice, having just come through a lobby campaign where they have been speaking on open-line radio shows, appearing on television, issuing press releases and meeting with MLAs. When I lay this image beside the requirement that the majority membership of the LAC had to be parents, it appears that a place was created for parent voice.

As I read about parents describing the work of the LAC (Vogel, 1975) and I see big, I form images of parents "completing forms and setting goals for the E.C.S. 'kindergarten' program; organizing monthly meetings and parent education workshops; establishing various committees such as telephone, duty roster, nutrition, etc.; setting policies and bylaws" (Vogel, 1975, p. 158). While not all these tasks may require decision-making, many appear to offer possibilities for parents to be engaged in meaningful decisions regarding their children's programs.

Seeing big, I develop an historical picture of parents who have a place on the kindergarten landscape in which they share their knowledge, have a voice, and participate in decision-making.

Seeing Small

Seeing small, we see from a distance. We move away from the details and particularities of the LAC meetings, the press releases, the parent conversations to look at parent advocacy for government funded kindergartens through the window of an airplane. Remember how looking out through the window of an airplane at the countryside surrounding Edmonton I was amazed by the exactness of each piece of land, neatly measured and divided in complete uniformity with those surrounding it? How straight, definitive lines ran in each direction clearly demarcating each section of land, each piece of property? Imagine for a minute that this aerial view of the land represents an aerial view of schooling. Remembering that Early Childhood programs are optional, not mandatory, not a part of 'real' school, where do you think the ECS property is situated in this larger picture of the land? Yes, you're right, that's it over there. While we do see parents strongly positioned on the Early Childhood property, we can also see that that piece of property is located on the edge of our view, somewhat distanced from the solid ground of the elementary school program. Seeing small, taking the perspective of a system, I have to wonder if the positioning of parents on the landscape of schools is an integral one after all. Does being positioned on an optional piece of property give parents an integral position?

Looking Long

Looking long at the landscape of schooling, I switch my focus. What I begin to attend to is not the sections of land but the borders which exist between them. What I expected to see earlier when I looked short at the kindergarten property was the presence and place of parents. What I was surprised by, when I switched my pattern of attending and looked long, was how broad and deep the river is which separates kindergarten from the rest of the elementary school program.

What happened to the positioning of parents as the articulation of kindergarten philosophy and goals got washed into the policy on program continuity? In any river swell, some things get carried forward in the rush of the roiling water while others get left behind, caught on snags along the bank or in crevices of rocks embedded in the river bottom. As I look at the solid ground of the elementary school property, I see parents positioned in tentative ways, in marginalized places. I wonder again about the wideness of the river separating the sections of land, about the strength of the current that keeps parents from crossing to the other side, about what happens to parents caught in the river swell.

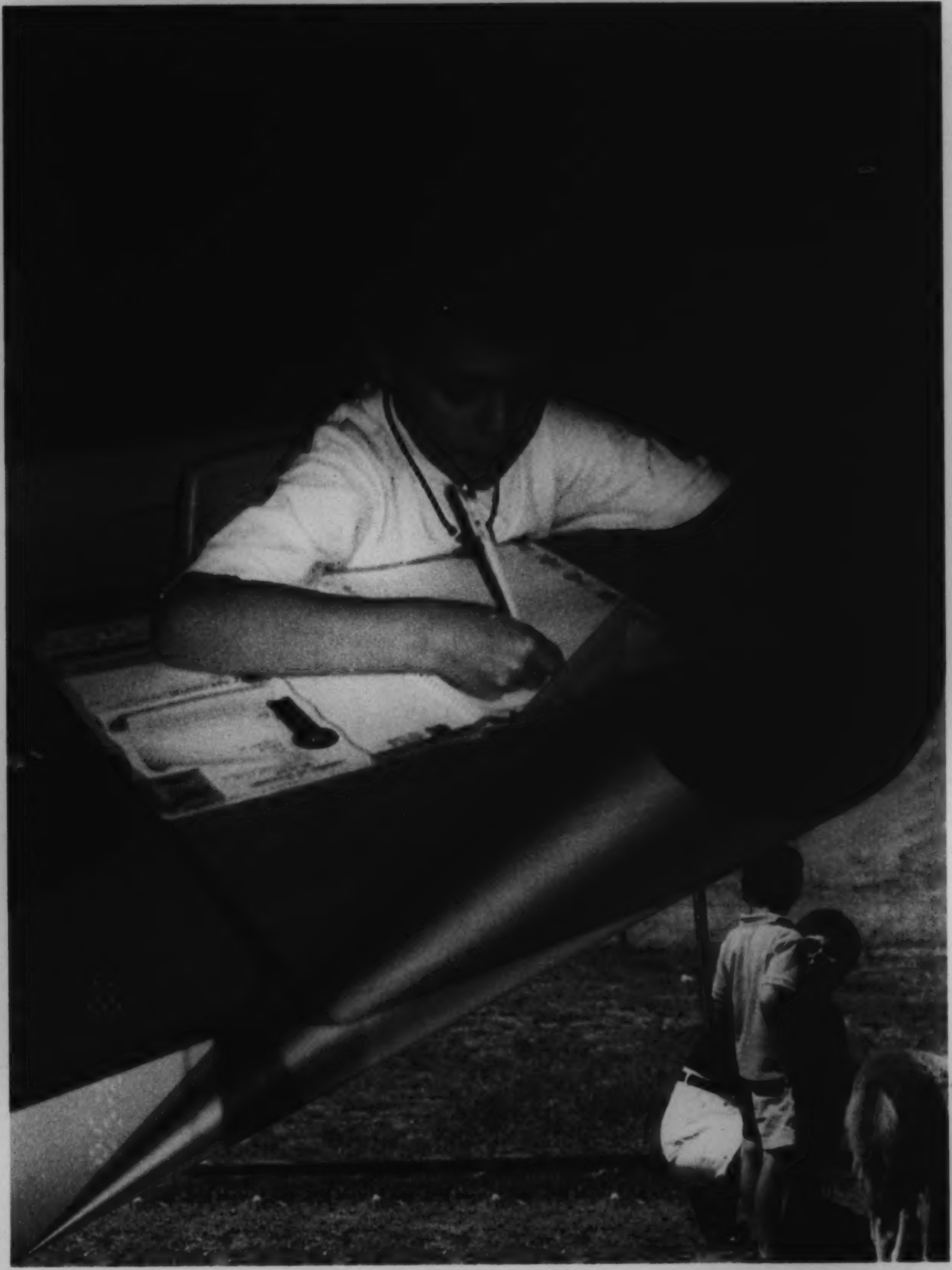
Coming back to parent advocacy for increased funding for public education, off the Gardenview landscape, and laying that story beside the kindergarten advocacy, I wonder how the two stories speak to one another. There is hopefulness in the kindergarten advocacy story in that parents did earn a position on one piece of the landscape. But were parents able to maintain that position? When I turn the picture of parent positioning and turn it again, moving it from the time of the historical establishment of school-based kindergartens to the time of the present, details and particularities of other moments come back into focus. I think again of my own experience with Cohen's first day of kindergarten—being briefed on backpacks and indoor shoes, being asked to wait outside the school until the program aide opened the door to let parents in. I think again of Danika's experience with Corbin's first day of kindergarten—being told to stand back as the first day of school is for children. Will this current parent advocacy movement help to reinforce parents' positioning on early childhood ground? Will this current parent advocacy movement push that positioning into farther reaches of the landscape?

Dianne's words, "...you've got to participate. You've got to own part of it..." continue to live inside my head. Remember how Benson shared Beare's distinction between the words involvement and participation—involvement meaning to be rolled into, brought into the act by another party, co-opted; participation meaning to have a part in, a right to be included? Don't you find it fascinating that Dianne used the word participation, not involvement? That she spoke of ownership? It makes me wonder who presently owns the ground of schooling. It makes me wonder what claim parents' 'right to be included' gives them on the ground. It makes me wonder if in claiming that right, the parent advocacy movement is going to cause ownership to shift or change in any way.

Dianne acknowledges that the superintendent of Edmonton Public Schools asked parents to serve the school district's agenda by advocating for increased funding. She comments though that he may not have realized, "We're not going away." She continues:

> Budget unpacks everything. Money is the beginning. It opens things up. A conversation about money, and how it will be spent, enables a conversation about all aspects of schooling. It gives parents the opportunity to say how they want their child's life in school to be lived. (telephone conversation, June 14, 2000)

When I pose the question "Who gets to decide?", Dianne insists it's going to be parents and educators together. "Parents don't want to take it over, but they do want a voice in it." She believes, "Parents are becoming an important part of the process of defining what is right for children. Parents are now asking for involvement when it is not being offered" (telephone conversation, June 14, 2000). Paley's words, "You can't say you can't play," roll in my head once again. Will an initial invitation to be involved, turn into a right to play, a rightful place to play? Is this a moment "when it might be possible to shift the course of a story" (Clandinin & Connelly,1998a, p. 161)?



CHAPTER V
CLASS PLACEMENTS

Class placements is another band of color that separated out of my research experiences. While Evelyn and I began talking about the placement of children into classes early in my research year, it became a focus of conversation during May, June and August, 1999, as one school year came to a close and another one opened. As I attend to the 'purples' of parent voice and participation in the placement of children into classes, I will use the frames of "open secrets" (Munro, 1994) and "dependent trust" (Bateson, 1989, p. 189) to look deeply at the school landscape and parents' positioning in relation to it. I will use a lens to see small as I look through these frames and I will use a lens to see big.

Images of Open Secrets, Images of Dependent Trust

Sorry for the interruption. That was my sister-in-law Dawne on the telephone. She's currently undergoing chemotherapy treatments for breast cancer and I'm just amazed at how she's handling it. One Saturday a couple of months ago, she had her grandkids and my three boys over for 'Hat Day.' The kids ranged in age from about three to ten. Dawne gathered everyone around a chalkboard in the living room and started to draw. She drew a picture of a body and talked to the kids about where her cancer had been prior to her surgery. As she drew, she talked about cancer cells and how they spread. She talked about chemotherapy, about what its job is, about what effect it will have on the cells in her body – the good ones as well as the cancer ones. She explained to the kids that not long after her chemotherapy begins, she will lose her hair and so she will need an interesting collection of hats to wear. She invited the children over to the dining room table to decorate her hats. The table was set up like a large craft table, a pile of hats in the middle surrounded by bottles of fabric paints, brushes and stencils, beads and sparkles and ribbon. As the kids painted, stencilled and glued, Dawne answered their questions and listened to how they were making sense of her cancer story.

While the paint and glue dried on the hats, we had snacks—sandwiches shaped like dragon footprints, fruit skewers resembling knights' swords, cookies, and juice. Then all the kids put on their hats and sat together on the chesterfield, posing in funny and appealing ways for the adults snapping photos.

If, during 'Hat Day,' a passerby happened to pause outside Dawne's living room window, the individual may have assumed she/he was catching a glimpse of a children's birthday party or a family celebration of some sort—games, crafts, food, photos for the family album. What struck me was we gathered together that Saturday afternoon in preparation for Dawne's chemotherapy much as families gather together for any other milestone. Dawne did not want her upcoming hair loss and the other side effects of the cancer treatment to be something that was not to be talked about, something we pretended we didn't see. She wanted the children to understand it as best they could and to talk, ask questions, share their feelings.

How different this experience with Dawne's cancer has been from my experience with my grandma's cancer. My sisters and I called her Mom because our farm and our grandparents' farm were only about five minutes apart and we saw each other nearly every day. When we were little, we called our parents Mommy and Daddy and our grandparents Mom and Dad. When we got bigger, we just called them all Mom and Dad. It confused a lot of people but it better described our relationship with them. I needed to tell you that because, as I tell this story, I call my grandma 'Mom.' If I call her 'Grandma,' it doesn't feel like I'm talking about the person I know.

I don't remember how old I was when Mom was first treated for breast cancer. I don't remember much about that first bout with cancer at all. I know she had been cancer free for well over five years when she developed a sore back. Because she was an active horsewoman, she believed she'd hurt her back riding. The doctor gave her a very wide leather belt to wear as a brace when she rode. When her back just didn't get better, more tests were done and it was discovered her cancer had recurred. This time the cancer was in her bone marrow.

I was in my first year of university when Mom came to Edmonton for cancer treatments. At the end of every day of classes, I would walk or catch a bus to the cancer hospital to spend time with her. Our family lived far from Edmonton and so my visits were important. It became obvious right away how serious Mom's cancer was. She was so sick. Every day she was noticeably frailer than the day before. When I'd lean over her bed to say hello and kiss her cheek, she'd squeeze my hand so long and so hard. As she looked into my eyes, I knew she knew she was dying—but we never talked about it. I filled the space with talk about my classes, my assignments, news from home, endless idle chatter about the weather or news events. I'd flip through magazines, talking out loud about the photos, stories, recipes, crafts. I filled the space with anything and everything I could think to talk about it.

As weeks passed, it got harder and harder to leave each day. Watching her fade, I worried that when I left each day I may never see her again. Yet I forced myself to cheerfully say goodbye and tell her I'd be back the next afternoon. As I arrived each 'next afternoon,' it was always with such emotion. Everyday I thought, "What if she died today when I was in classes and no one was able to contact me? What if her bed is empty when I walk through the doorway?" I'd steel myself for my entry into her room. Once I saw she was there, I'd take a deep breath, push back the tears, then move to the side of her bed. Again, she'd squeeze my hand long and gaze knowingly into my eyes—and again we'd talk about everything and anything I could think to make conversation about. We talked about her return to the farm, about the horses—we never did talk about her dying.

Alice Munro published a book of short stories entitled Open Secrets (1994). That title resonates with me. Mom's dying was an open secret. It was open because she knew it was happening—her look each day, the way she held my hand told me that—and I knew it was happening. She was physically disappearing a little more each day. And we both knew the other one knew. But it remained a secret because we never talked about it, because we pretended her hospitalization was about getting better, not about dying, because we pretended she was going to return home to the farm and ride horses again.

When I think again about Dawne's story of the chemotherapy side effects, I think about how she planned 'Hat Day,' how she extended the invitations, how she invited conversation about her cancer. Because the story is hers, she is the one who decided whether her hair loss was going to be an open secret or not a secret at all. When I think again about Mom's second bout with cancer, I think about how she held my hand and looked into my eyes so hard. Because the cancer was hers, she was the one who decided whether her dying was going to be an open secret or not a secret at all. She chose to keep it an open secret.

Dawne is storying her life with cancer differently than Mom did, in the way we've just talked about—by inviting conversation about the chemotherapy side effects—but in another way too. When the surgeon performed her lumpectomy, he took tissue samples in seven lymph glands to see if the cancer had spread. It was because he found traces of cancer cells in one of her glands that the chemotherapy became necessary. Before she met with the oncologist to hear his recommended treatment plan, she faxed her test results to her cousin Barry, a doctor in California, and to her brother-in-law Ron, a doctor in Idaho—two professionals she knew and trusted. She also read what they recommended and what she gathered through the Canadian Cancer Board and through other sources. Having listened to and discussed their recommendations with them, having done a lot of reading, she entered the conversation with her oncologist in an informed and thoughtful way. She was positioned to have a voice in the conversation as well as to hear his. She was positioned to participate in the decision about her treatment plan rather than to receive his decision.

When Mom was experiencing her second bout with cancer, it was 1976. Twenty-four years ago there were fewer options for the treatment of cancer but there was also much less questioning of medical knowing. Mom, and those of us in her family, willingly accepted that the doctor's knowledge placed him in a position of power and authority. Even as Mom continued to be violently ill each day, even as we agonized over the quality of her life, we continued to be silent and to accept her prescribed treatment plan. Bateson (1989) would call this kind of acceptance "dependent trust" (p. 189).

Dependent trust is a trust in which we give ourselves over to those perceived to be more powerful than ourselves. It is a trust that requires us to move away from being self-supporting toward placing our well-being into the hands of someone else. Dependent trust does not enable us to be genuine partners or responsible participants (Bateson, 1989, p. 189).

The trust Dawne placed in her oncologist is a different kind of trust. She brought to her relationship with him the knowledge and advice gained from Barry and Ron and from what she read. Dawne's trust is based on a combination of belief and healthy skepticism, commitment and independence (p. 189). Her trust in her doctor is based on her ability to dialogue with him—to honor his knowledge while questioning it. Her trust in her doctor is based on her commitment to a treatment plan in which she has a voice. Her trust in her doctor is based on her opportunity to be a genuine partner and responsible participant in her treatment plan.

Open secrets. Dependent trust. That telephone call sparked a lot of conversation for me. Do open secrets exist everywhere—not just in families—but in all parts of our lives? Can we be "unwilling to work from a position of dependent trust" (Bateson, 1989, p. 189)—not just in regard to our health—but in all parts of our lives? I wonder....

The phone call pulled me somewhere else for awhile but I will come back to these ideas of dependent trust and open secrets as we look beyond the images in this next group of photos. These photos I've scattered out in front of us will take us somewhere new. They are all photos of the first day of school at Gardenview in 1999. They're photos that create images of new beginnings, of new classes forming.

Snapshots

> *Posted outside the classroom door, a white piece of paper is in prominent view. A listing of students' names run down the lefthand side of the paper. A teacher's name and a grade level are displayed in bold print at the top of the list. Clustered around that paper, a group of parents and children are straining to read the list. A parent standing closest to the list has her finger poised by a name part way down the page.*
>
> *On one side of the counter in the front office stand Sarah, the school secretary, Francis, the new assistant principal, and Stella, a parent. Smiles on their faces indicate the warmth with which they are interacting with the parents and students waiting on the other side of the counter. Sarah, Francis and Stella each hold a copy of the class placements for the new school year in their hands. A floor plan of the school rests on the counter.*
>
> *Evelyn sits with a parent in her office, obviously engaged in conversation. The office door is closed. The parent's face displays caring, concern. Evelyn's face displays a still attentiveness. She holds a small notepad in one hand, a pen poised in the other.*

Memorybank Movie: Part I

As I mentioned, the photos I've just shared are photos I took at Gardenview on August 30, 1999. It was the first day of school. I love first days. The school fills with teachers and students wearing new clothes, loaded down with new books and materials, new backpacks, new supplies, new indoor shoes. The air fills with the energy of best aspirations, best intentions, best relations. It's always an emotionally charged day.

Gardenview was no different that day. Parents and children flooded into the school through entrances all over the building. Teachers stood outside their classroom doorways, greeting those passing by. Voices, words, laughter, bits of conversation surged through the air as individuals connected, exchanging stories of their summer holidays or thoughts on the school year just ahead. People moved in all directions—across the foyer and atrium, into and out of pods and classrooms, the library, the office, and out the front entrance.

In these photos, parents and students are gathering with real purpose. This year Gardenview staff chose not to post their class lists in advance of the first day. In the first photo, parents and children familiar with Gardenview are checking a class list to determine if that is the classroom the child will be in for this school year. In the second photo, the parents and children lined up in the office are new to Gardenview. They've come to the office to get direction about what classrooms their children will be in and where to find those classrooms in the school. In the third photo, Evelyn is meeting with a parent who has made a specific request for her son's placement and has just discovered he has not been placed in the classroom she requested. These three photos give a glimpse of the class placement process at Gardenview School—the process through which it is decided with which teacher the child will be placed for the upcoming school year.

In my first taped conversation with Evelyn in October, 1998, class placements became part of our conversation. We talked about the class placement process the school had just been through with the September, 1998 opening. Evelyn reflected on that process.

> [T]he bottom line is parents do want to meet with you and talk about their child's placement for the next year—what kind of environment they want their child in. And do they not have a right to come in?...Does the parent not have a right to question the class placement for their child?...Well I think the parents do have the right. (taped conversation, October 29, 1998)

Acknowledging that as a parent she had a desire to participate at various times in her own children's school placements and working from a belief in parent voice in the placement process, Evelyn reflected on how she tried to design a process that invited parent input.

Class lists were available to families in August, ten days before school started, at the time students were invited in to pick up their school supplies. Evelyn said once parents and students read the lists, she had line-ups of parents wanting to meet with her, requesting changes to their child's placement or requesting their child's friends be placed in the same classroom. After meeting with parents for many days, adjusting and readjusting class lists, Evelyn remarked that parent confidence in their child's teacher was high and, as a result, school opening proceeded smoothly. The process was long, exhausting and difficult. Some teachers expressed concern about their placement judgments not being honored and, as the year progressed, some parents began to express concern about how honoring the requests of some parents may have negatively influenced the class composition of the children of others. It was evident there was much to reflect on and no easy answers.

Our conversations about class placements continued throughout my research year but became frequent, and often lengthy, in May when the placement process began once again in its initial stages. As parents approached Evelyn to have conversations about their children's transition into a new school year and Evelyn reflected on drafting a letter to parents about the class placement process, our conversations centered on the many facets of this process—facets that were complex and often, it seemed, conflicting.

I mentioned a number of these complex, sometimes conflicting, facets earlier when I wrote about the multiplicity of who I am as a researcher at Gardenview and I told of my multiple positionings with Evelyn. I talked a little bit then about how Evelyn and I continued to raise questions with one another about whether teachers, as educated professionals, should create class lists, about whether parents, with their knowledge of their children, should be invited to have input into class placements, about what may be considered a 'legitimate' parent request, about whether parents' input should just center on their child and not on teachers. We raised questions about whether there is a way to draw on both teacher knowing and parent knowing in this process, about what criteria should be used to make placement decisions, about whether children's friendships are a valid criterion, about how you honor what is best for all children in this process. We talked a great deal about how you ensure the process is fair for all families and does not create a privileged inner circle, about whether the process should be private or public, whether it should be open or closed. It seemed that the longer we looked at the issues, the more wonders we raised.

At the May school council meeting, I chatted with Evelyn and two parents. One parent, Donna, raised concerns about the class placement process the previous August. Donna felt parent input shifted the class lists substantially, resulting in classes that were no longer balanced and equitable. As a result, she supported creating class lists based on teacher knowledge of students. As Evelyn, Donna and Lindsay talked about the placement process, I was intrigued by Donna's focus on the school's processes and the class patterns. She talked about what was good for all children, not just what was good for her daughter.

When I saw Lindsay in the workroom the next day, I mentioned that I'd like to talk more with Donna about her thoughts and perceptions of the class placement process. Lindsay indicated I may also be interested in talking to Stella, another parent, about the topic. Lindsay knew how different their points of view were—Donna believed teachers should make class placement decisions and Stella believed in the importance of parent voice.

I met both Donna and Stella individually in their homes for well over an hour. Their comments reflected careful consideration of the placement process. They both spoke of doing what is best for children and yet they each saw a different way to do that.

A Playlet—In Three Voices

As I listened to each parent speak, and read and reread the transcripts of the conversations later, I thought it would have been interesting to have heard Donna and Stella speak together about class placements. How would they have responded to one another? How would their stories have resonated with one another? How would their ways of seeing have come together or bumped up against one another? I also wondered how Evelyn would have responded to their differing ways of seeing, how she would have made sense of the complexities and ambiguities that would have arisen in the conversation.

With a sense of curiosity I laid their three voices alongside one another, creating the following 'playlet.' The playlet is fictionalized in that a three way conversation about class placements did not occur between Evelyn, Donna and Stella. Yet the 'characters' and their 'lines' are real—the words in the conversation are the characters' own, pulled from transcripts of individual conversations with them and, in Evelyn's case, from field notes as well. The setting is real. The fact that conversations about class placements were occurring on the Gardenview landscape is real.

TAKING THEIR PLACES

Characters
EVELYN, *the school principal*
STELLA, *a parent*
DONNA, *a parent*
SARAH, *school secretary*

TIME: *Late morning, end May, 1999*

SETTING: *The Gardenview staffroom. Large windows line the lefthand and back walls of the room. A long row of tables surrounded by chairs runs parallel to the windows. A cream colored sectional is situated in the far right corner of the room while nearer the doorway two loveseats face one another, a coffee table between them, creating an inviting space. The room is bright, walls lined with inspirational messages about children, teaching and learning. Tables are adorned with candles, plants, symbols and mementos of a shared mission and a shared journey.*

AT RISE: EVELYN *is perched on the loveseat facing the doorway, leaning forward earnestly, engaged in a telephone conversation. As STELLA enters and fills a glass with water from the cooler, EVELYN replaces the telephone receiver. She slides back, shifting into a more relaxed position, and exhales deeply.*

STELLA: It's been a really busy morning, hasn't it?

EVELYN: It has, but we've registered well over 200 students in the last day and a half and things are running so smoothly.

STELLA: That's because Sarah is such a great school secretary—and a real ambassador! Parents are really appreciating the time she is taking with them.

EVELYN: It's also because you're such a great help. With you copying the forms and organizing the paperwork, it gives Sarah time to answer parents' questions, to explain the school fees, and to talk with them.

STELLA: (*Walking over to* EVELYN *and sitting down on the opposite loveseat*) It looks like lots of parents wanted to talk with you as well. As they register their kids, are they already thinking about teachers and classes for next year?

EVELYN: Well, it is the end of May already. That's typically when parents begin coming to see me about their children's classes for next year. Generally, though, it's been parents with a "legitimate request."[15]

STELLA: Well, my kids don't have special needs or anything but if I wanted to "talk to [you] this year before placement and give you my reasons why I think that certain teachers would be better than others…you know, give [you] Christopher's strong sides and his weak sides and where I wanted to work with him, and same with Randall and gave [you] reasons why these particular teachers would work for me,"[16] would you consider that a legitimate request?

EVELYN: "If there were only a few requests, maybe 20 or so, I could accommodate them. But when there are so many, it becomes dysfunctional."[17] (*Just then* DONNA *enters the staffroom and walks toward* EVELYN *and* STELLA)

DONNA: Evelyn, may I interrupt for just a sec…(*Noticing* STELLA *and smiling*) Oh, Stella, hi!

STELLA: (*Returning her smile*) Hi Donna.

EVELYN: How are you, Donna?

DONNA: I'm good, thanks. I just wanted to confirm the time of our grade six farewell committee meeting this evening.

STELLA and EVELYN: (*In unison*) 7:00 (*And then laughter*).

EVELYN: Hey, we were just starting to talk about parent requests for placements. Do you have a minute? Do you want to share with Stella some of the concerns about parent requests which you raised with me after the school council meeting on Wednesday night?

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[15] Field notes, May 21, 1999

[16] All Stella's quotations have been drawn from a transcript of a taped conversation, dated January 3, 2000.

[17] Field notes, May 18, 1999

DONNA: Yes, I can stay for a bit. But do you really want to hear this Stella?

STELLA: You know, honestly I do. Evelyn and I were just talking about legitimate parent requests and I guess I believe all requests are legitimate. "I think that parents should have input. I think that teachers know one view and they know how the kids work in class and who they work with, and that's great. But then they don't hear the stuff that comes home. You know, they'll say something, oh, well, the teacher did this or that. It could be a teacher or it could be a child and, you know, I don't run in there every day and say, 'Oh Randall's not getting along with so-and-so,' or 'They're not working very well together.' I just don't. I try and do it from my end saying, 'You try and work with them' and we work it out [at home] and the teacher doesn't know any of that is going on.... So I think that it's really important that the parents get some input."

DONNA: I do think "Evelyn tried to decide what was the best, with the teachers' influence and the parents' requests, and made up some classes.... When the lists were actually done up,...I think there were quite a few [requests for changes]. [Parents and children] sort of saw the list, 'All of my friends...', 'All of my child's friends are in this class. I want mine...' ...Anyway, what happened is through all the juggling of the class, [my daughter's teacher] ended up with a classroom that was really not well suited. He ended up with an awful lot of children that demanded a lot of attention, not necessarily underachievers or anything, but just had some personality things that were really strong and, [it's been a] very difficult year for the man.... I didn't feel that it was fair to him. It wasn't fair to all these children in his class that ended up, I don't want to say getting dumped there, because of the demands of other parents. So what I was trying to explain to Evelyn was that if she has a parent come up and say to her, 'I have a child that has a problem in this way and so I want you to look at next year's teachers and try and figure where my child would be best suited.' I mean we all want our child in the perfect spot.... She then takes the list and she takes the teachers' recommendations and she comes up with what she considers a plan. That has to be the end."[18]

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[18] All Donna's quotations have been drawn from a transcript of a taped conversation, dated February 22, 2000.

EVELYN: "Because one of the dilemmas that I have, and it's a moral and ethical issue, is that because parents do make such strong requests, we do get classrooms that are not equitable in our school. So we have very strong classrooms and we have a very few classrooms that aren't as strong. So that's an issue for me.... That's a dilemma for me. I don't blame the parents but, on the other hand, we do have a situation that often becomes not a fair situation, so it's a problem.... I want to honor parents' voice and I think that's important. Ultimately though I have to be responsible for the kind of learning community that we organize for kids. So to set up two nice classrooms and to have one suffer, it's not fair. But, you know, in a way that's what results."[19]

STELLA: "But if [a parent] wanted a particular teacher I don't think it would have affected it too much unless there was one particular teacher in a grade that nobody wanted."

DONNA: "Evelyn has some excellent people on her staff."

EVELYN: (*Rising to her feet*) Let me just go and get my letter to parents about class placements. I've written a first draft. "I'm just playing with this now. I'll just get your opinion."[20]

(STELLA *and* DONNA *chat casually about the grade six farewell while* EVELYN *is out of the room*)

EVELYN: (*Already speaking as she enters the room and returns to her place on the loveseat*) "So here's what I've written.

> We're asking for the support of our parents in trusting the professional decision making of our teachers and the administration in organizing the learning communities for the new school year. Making special requests for the placement of your child can result in a classroom not having an equitable distribution of students.

(*Looking up at* STELLA *and* DONNA *from the letter she is reading*) Because I give [parents] the criteria, too, ahead of time. (*Then continuing to read*)

> Too many requests can result in a difficult year for both the teacher and the group of students affected. Requesting a particular teacher, requesting friends to be in the same room, hinders the organization of children into effective learning communities and does not guarantee an effective learning community for all children. This needs to be a

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[19] Taped conversation, May 5, 1999

[20] Taped conversation, May 5, 1999

> professional decision based on the criteria we have listed above. Our staff spends many hours looking at each student, making decisions based on individual needs and the needs of the group as a whole. The integrity of the learning community and their learning capacity as a group needs to be central to decisions which impact the educational program for all children in a new school year.

(*Setting the paper on the coffee table and once again leaning back into the loveseat*) Do you think that's too strong?"[21]

DONNA: Well, as you already know Evelyn, my husband "Mac and I talked a bit about this and he said that he thought it was absolutely no parent requests. That's your policy. Because he said, 'Okay, really if you think about it, if there is a child that's struggling, the parent should talk to the teacher. The teacher should recommend the child go into a certain classroom and the teachers, [let's say] the grade three teachers this year should get together and they should look at the grade four teachers and they should make up the class lists of where the children are going to go. And if there's an issue,...you tell the teacher that.' "

STELLA: "[The teachers] know my kids and what they're like and I trust their decision of where they'd put them. But I'd still like to discuss it with [Evelyn]. I do think that parents know their kids in a different way. And I think no matter how wonderful a teacher you are, and how good your relationship with the kids is, there's things you don't know. Because they are different at home. And they do tell their parents things that they don't say at school. And I mean, there's so many experiences that you have with your kids as a parent that the teachers will never know about.... I think [parent input] is fair. I don't think you're butting in or trying to do anything negative. I think you're trying to make the situation work for a teacher and you. I mean, you don't want your child in a class where he's not doing the right things and coming home frustrated and then he's frustrated in class and the teacher has to deal with it and you have to deal with it. I don't think it's unfair."

DONNA: "I don't even think there are any teachers at Gardenview where people would say, 'Oh, you absolutely don't want your child in that class because that teacher is really bad.' But even if there is one that's a little less, you know, I think maybe you just possibly get a little more involved in your child's year. This was an issue we dealt with when Karen was in grade two. We had a difference of opinion on teaching style with the grade two teacher. That was at [a different school].... She didn't believe in teaching the children math because she thought they already knew enough math by the time they came into grade two. And as she's talking to Mac, I'm watching, he's turning red. And so he comes over [to me], 'We'll pull her out of the school.' And I said, 'No, no.' We put her in Kumon, [a private 'extracurricular' math program], for the year. You know, you sort of work with it."

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[21] Taped conversation, May 5, 1999

STELLA: "It's just like Christopher this year. I wasn't happy with the math teacher that he got but you know we've worked at home a lot. That's just the way we've worked the situation.... Now I know how the classroom works so we've just basically taken it on at home.... This is just one subject and we can deal with it but if you have a whole year like that, it's lost."

EVELYN: Stella, you know with any concerns you have, you're always invited to meet with the teacher and to meet with me. There are things both the teacher and I would do to address your concerns and to make sure your son had a successful school year. There's something else though in your comment about fairness that I'd like to talk about. You may not see it Stella, but "it is the same parents who make requests every year and in doing that they are privileging their children."[22] "[Their children] get the best teachers every year. Now is that fair? I ask that question.... It creates an inner circle."[23]

STELLA: "I don't think [it does]. ...I just feel that the opportunity is out there and [Evelyn, you are] always willing to talk to any of the parents. If someone feels strongly about something and felt that they were cheated, then they should be talking [to you]. If [they] chose not to, it's just because it's [their] choice. You know [you've] never ever turned anybody away and not talk[ed] with them. It may not work out the way that they want it to, but [you've] always given them the opportunity to discuss the situation with [you]. Right?"

EVELYN: It comes back though to the number of requests I get. "Last year I had two hundred requests, I bet. I've been saying to parents, 'If I get ten requests I can handle them, if I get two hundred I can't.' "[24]

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[22] Field notes, June 22, 1999

[23] Taped conversation, May 5, 1999

[24] Field notes, May 21, 1999

DONNA: Well, "the other thing that [you did Evelyn was you] had talked to kids or had given kids a sense of, you know, having a circle of support and so [you'd] given kids an opportunity to say, 'Here are some people that I'd like to be in a classroom with.' " Could that have been one of the reasons the number of requests were so high?

EVELYN: You're right, "…the whole friendship thing got going. Like Mary wanted to be with Lorraine and Lorraine wanted to be with…and so basically in the end I think we were organizing our classes based on friendships."[25] Letters from parents were not only "choosing a teacher but also stating what friends they want[ed] in the class with their child. In one note, the parent made a request for the placement of six children into one class. Honoring that note would result in one quarter of the class being determined."[26] Reflecting on it now, I think "inviting student voice last year backfired. By talking about support systems, we may have created a dependency. We need to prepare kids for an everchanging world. We need to emphasize more the developing of new relationships."[27]

STELLA: "Right, so they're going to make friends no matter what and I've always encouraged them to do that. That's never been my issue, ever. I've never chosen a class for my child based on friends….I'd rather go for the teacher. That's the one who can influence how the class is going to make or break."

DONNA: "I never really felt that I should have any idea as to what the next year's teachers are [like] with my oldest child. All you're doing really is listening to other people's opinions of the teacher…. People talk. 'Oh, your child's been in —, so what did you think?…I just didn't feel comfortable with that."

STELLA: But I make my decisions based on what I know. "I've always tried to have a really good relationship with the teachers and the staff…. You [have] to be open to talk to [the teachers and] principal…. It really comes down to relationships."

DONNA: But "in Gardenview you get so much volunteering that, Evelyn, [are you feeling], I guess, maybe obligated? I know we have some situations where parents expect to be able to dictate where their child will be as far as teachers go."

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[25] Taped conversation, May 5, 1999
[26] Field notes, May 18, 1999
[27] Field notes, May 21, 1999

EVELYN: And does that bring us back to an inner circle again? To privileging some kids and families? It's a moral and ethical dilemma.[28] You know what I'm thinking? "I've sent [a class placement] letter out for the last two years. Parents have seen how massive the requests have become and how they have begun to really affect classes."[29] "Maybe I should not send a letter out at this point. Maybe this year I should do nothing. Maybe parents already know the process. Maybe it creates anxiety for parents when they get the letter and they feel they have to then make a request."[30] Then, I'll send a note home on the last day of school wishing everyone a happy summer and letting them know that class lists will be posted on the first day of school.[31]

STELLA: Posting on the first day?!! That makes me "totally stressed. I like to prepare my kids. If they know what's going to happen, even if it's not a teacher that they want, if they know that's who they are going to get, I can say, 'Well, okay, this is why this guy is good.'…I know…Randall [will be] up a couple nights wondering, 'Where am I going to be? What class am I going to be in?' I [would like to know] beforehand where my kids [are] going."

EVELYN: Stella, this year, I think you'll just have to "trust that we've done the best we can."[32] "You know how much I believe in parent voice,"[33] "[l]ike I'm empathetic to the parents, I am."[34] It's just that the issue of class placements is so complex and there is just no one right answer.[35] I struggle with the moral and ethical dilemmas of it and with trying to make "a children first decision."[36] I think I will try some things differently this year. To date, I've had fewer requests from parents than in other years—which is interesting. Maybe "the tides are turning…. Who knows? Maybe next week we'll get fifty [requests]. We'll just have to see how it unfolds."[37]

(*Just then* SARAH *enters the staffroom from the front office*)

SARAH: Evelyn, there's a parent here that would like to meet with you.

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[28] Field notes, June 22, 1999
[29] Field notes, June 13, 1999
[30] Field notes, May 21, 1999
[31] Field notes, June 13, 1999
[32] Field notes, August 24, 1999
[33] Field notes, June 22, 1999
[34] Taped conversation, May 5, 1999
[35] Field notes, May 18, 1999
[36] Taped conversation, May 5, 1999
[37] Field notes, June 13, 1999

EVELYN: (Rising wearily from the loveseat)Thanks for this conversation. "I think it really heightened [my] awareness of parents' thinking.... We have to pay attention.... I think that we just build up such walls and barriers when we don't have [this] kind of exchange."[38]

DONNA: I don't envy you your position, I can see how hard it must be at times.

STELLA: But I'm glad you're always willing to talk with us, Evelyn. "It's very complex when you think about it but, you know, if you really go down the line and start from where it should be, that's the child, absolutely, that's where you should be looking first."

EVELYN: (*Beginning to walk toward the office*) That's one thing we all agree on at least! (*Laughter*)

(DONNA *and* STELLA *follow* EVELYN *out of the staffroom, their conversation shifting again to tonight's meeting about the grade six farewell, as the curtain closes*)

THE END

Looking Beyond the Images

In this constructed conversation, I had Evelyn, Stella and Donna talk about many of the complexities related to parent voice in class placement decisions. Stella raised the question about parent requests and challenged the assumption of legitimate requests. She spoke strongly in support of parent knowing and of how significant the match between teacher and child is to the child's life at school and at home. Donna questioned the fairness of parent requests to the overall composition of classes and suggested such requests create inequities by overshadowing the informed decisions of teachers. She supported ongoing parent conversations with their children's current teachers rather than specific requests for future teachers. Evelyn continued to speak in support of parent voice but also drew attention to the complexity because of the number of requests and because of requests for placement with specific teachers and with specific friends. She troubled over how to give parents an opportunity for input while maintaining equitable classes and the best possible learning environment for all children. How is it these three individuals see class placements so differently? Is it because they experienced the process differently? Is it because of the lens through which they view the process?

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[38] Taped conversation, September 27, 1999

Donna

Donna sees class placements through a lens that sees small. She moves away from the details and particularities of her own children's class placements and focuses her gaze on the effect she believes parent requests have on all children. Looking out the airplane window, she sees "that every parent wants the very best for their child" (taped conversation, February 22, 2000). She also sees, through this distanced systems lens, it is not feasible, first, that every parent is enabled to make a request and, second, that every request could be granted. Further, she sees that those requests which are granted ultimately influence the placement of other children as well.

Through a lens that sees small, a lens that focusses on trends and tendencies, Donna sees parent requests for teachers sometimes being made based on the opinions of other parents. She notes that what one parent may be looking for in a teacher may be unlike what another values. She also notes that all children have unique needs. Therefore, what is an ideal or desired teacher or environment for one child, or in one parent's eyes, may not be ideal or desired for another child, or in another parent's eyes. She determines that parents' input should be focussed on their children rather than on teacher selection.

Donna believes in a class placement process which is fair to all students, parents, and teachers, a process in which placement decisions are made by teachers. In believing teachers should make placement decisions, though, Donna is not endorsing a position of dependent trust for parents. She supports parents' ongoing communication with their child's teacher. She supports initiating conversations with the teacher to talk about the child's strengths, or struggles, or about special circumstances. She sees parent knowing and teacher knowing being shared and exchanged as a continuous part of the communication process. At the end of the year, the teacher's recommendation for the child's upcoming class placement would then be a reflection of the combined voice of parent and teacher. It would be a reflection of a composite knowing of the child.

Stella

Stella sees class placements through a lens that sees big. She moves away from trends and tendencies to focus on the details and particularities of her own experiences and her children's experiences. She sees "from the point of view of the participant in the midst of what is happening" (Greene, 1995, p. 10). She speaks of the knowing she has of her children that a teacher will never have. "Because they are different at home. And they do tell their parents things that they don't say at school" (taped conversation, January 3, 2000). She believes attending to parent knowing in the class placement process will ensure a better match between teacher and child.

Stella supports strongly Evelyn's willingness to talk to any parent. She values the opportunity it provides parents to discuss situations with her. Seeing big, attending to specificity, she recognizes there are times, like with Christopher's math program this year, when the contact she needed was with the principal rather than the teacher. Stella does not expect every parent request to be granted automatically ("It may not work out the way that they want it to..."), but she does expect their voice will be listened to ("...[you've] never ever turned anybody away and not talk[ed] with them.").

Stella does trust her children's teachers and the principal. Her trust, like Dawne's, is trust based on a combination of belief and healthy skepticism, commitment and independence (Bateson, 1989). Her trust in her children's teachers and principal is based on her knowing of them. Because trust builds with time and contact, Stella spends time in the school to develop "a really good relationship with the teachers and the staff" (taped conversation, January 3, 2000). It is in this relationship that Stella can both honor and question teacher knowing. It is in this relationship that Stella can lay her parent knowing beside teacher knowing. It is in this relationship that Stella's parent voice can be heard and attended to genuinely. It is in this relationship that Stella rejects the notion of dependent trust.

Evelyn

Evelyn sees the class placement process through both a lens that sees small and a lens that sees big. Seeing small, using the lens of a system, "taking a primarily technical point of view" (Greene, 1995, p. 11), Evelyn moves toward asking parents to refrain from making requests. "Too many requests can result in a difficult year for both the teacher and the group of students affected. Requesting a particular teacher, requesting friends be in the same room, hinders the organization of children into effective learning communities and does not guarantee an effective learning community for all children" (taped conversation, May 5, 1999).

Seeing big, using a lens that brings her "in close contact with details and with particularities that cannot be reduced to statistics or even to the measurable" (Greene, 1995, p. 10), attending to "the faces and gestures of individuals, of actual living persons" (p. 11), Evelyn moves toward making a place for parents' voice. "Like I'm empathetic to the parents. I am.... [W]hat happens [is] you have mothers and fathers in tears. So am I going to ignore that? No!" (taped conversation, May 5, 1999).

Seeing small, Evelyn attends to the over two hundred requests from parents, to the single requests which, if granted, would determine the placements of one quarter of a classroom, to the inequities in learning environments which are created for teachers and for children, to the days and days she spends meeting with parents and juggling names on class lists, to the privileging of certain children and families and possibly certain teachers. Seeing small, Evelyn focusses on the complexities of bringing a belief in honoring parent voice together with a belief in putting 'children first.' Evelyn focusses on the complexities of trying to translate two apparently contradictory beliefs into practice. It is through this systems lens, this lens of "benevolent policy making" (Greene, 1995, p. 11), that Evelyn drafts a letter which says, "[Class placements] need to be a professional decision based on the criteria we have listed above" (taped conversation, May 5, 1999).

Seeing big, Evelyn attends to the placement of a painfully shy child who needs the security of a good friend or two, to the placement of an academic challenge student with specific programming needs (field notes, May 21, 1999), to the placement of a child whose family is new to Canada and whose parents want the comfort and support of having the same teacher the older sibling had last year, to the placement of a child who learns best in a 'hands-on' classroom (field notes, August 30, 1999). Seeing big, Evelyn focusses on the particularities of each individual child's placement. Evelyn focusses on the parents' stories of their children, on the intensity of their hopes for their children. It is through this personal lens, this lens which attends to "names and histories" (Greene, 1995, p. 11), that Evelyn sees,

> [T]he bottom line is parents do want to meet with you and talk about their child's placement for the next year—what kind of environment they want their child in. And do they not have a right to come in?...Does the parent not have a right to question the class placement for their child? ...Well I think the parents do have the right. (taped conversation, October 29, 1998)

"The vision that sees things small looks at schooling through the lenses of a system—a vantage point of power..." (Greene, 1995, p. 11). Seeing small, Evelyn accepts the power the system of schooling grants her as principal and she asks parents to place their children's wellbeing into professional hands as decisions are being made about class placements. She asks parents to accept a position of dependent trust.

The vision that sees things big "resist[s] viewing other human beings as mere objects or chess pieces and view[s] them in their integrity and particularity instead" (p. 10). Seeing big, Evelyn rejects the power the system of schooling grants her as principal and asks parents to participate—meaningfully and genuinely—in decisions about their children's class placements. She asks parents to accept a position of independent trust.

Evelyn's movement between seeing small and seeing big is what enables her to see the complexities and the contradictions in the class placement process. In this complexity and this messiness wonders arise. In seeing class placement in terms of dependent trust and independent trust wonders arise.

Who owns the ground on which class placement decisions are made?

Who decides?

Who is welcomed, invited, included in the process?

Who decides?

Whose voice gets heard? The owner's/the host's? The invited guests'?

Who decides?

There's even more to this story of class placements than issues of dependent trust and independent trust. There was a topic left undiscussed in the conversation among Evelyn, Donna and Stella, a topic possibly avoided. Let's move back to the three-way conversation to think about what was unsaid. When Stella says she doesn't see that parent requests for particular teachers would affect anything too much unless "there was one particular teacher in a grade that nobody wanted," Donna responds by saying the staff at Gardenview are excellent and Evelyn responds by going to get her draft letter to parents about class placements. No one addresses the issue of an unrequested teacher, no one addresses the reasons a teacher may be unrequested.

Later in the conversation, Donna again states her belief in the strength of the teachers at Gardenview but this time she extends her statement by saying, "But even if there is one that's a little less, you know, I think maybe you just possibly get a little more involved in your child's year." She doesn't say out loud a little less what. Even though she doesn't specify the what, Stella knows what Donna is talking about. She agrees that if 'the less, you know' is in one area, the family can work the situation out through what they do at home. She is concerned though "if you have a whole year like that, it's lost." Evelyn quickly impresses on Stella how important it would be to share a concern like that with both the teacher and the principal and assures her it would be attended to. She then shifts the conversation back to fairness. The conversation evades a discussion of the teacher who is a 'little less, you know.' It evades an acknowledgement that if there is a teacher a 'little less, you know' there must be a teacher who is a 'little more, you know.' It evades an acknowledgement that if there are teachers a 'little less, you know' and a 'little more, you know' then parents will want their children placed with the teachers with a 'little more, you know.'

There is an open secret being kept in their conversation. While no one takes the cover off, each one of them recognizes it and knows the others recognize it too. That open secret is staff performance—the 'good' and the 'bad' teachers, the skilled and the unskilled, the caring and the not so caring, the 'little less, you know' and the 'little more, you know.'

I didn't design the playlet to purposefully create an open secret. I wrote the playlet in a way that honored the open secret of staff performance which existed in my individual conversations with Evelyn, Stella, and Donna. Let me play a second memorybank movie so that you can see for yourself the open secret being kept in those conversations.

Memorybank Movie: Part 2

Sitting together behind the closed door of Evelyn's office, positioned as fellow principals, Evelyn and I acknowledged the open secret of staff performance being kept in conversations about parent input into class placements.

Evelyn: And the real issue [in class placements] is performance. That's the real issue. It's the teacher's practice and it's the teacher's ability to relate to kids. And that's what it's about. It's not parents that are being nitpicky. It's because they recognize there's a difference. And you know what? I don't blame them....

Debbie: If you could put everything on the table, but you can't.

Evelyn: You can't put it all out there. I mean if parents could come up and say, "Look Mrs. Bennett, the reality is you don't have...," well, I guess they're putting that out. There's not a lot you can do about that and so you'd say, "Well, you know that is perception." Right? That's all you can say. But it is a perception and it's real.

Debbie: When I was principal at Julia Kiniski, we were looking at some studies of multi-aged groupings. In each study, it came down to one key factor in children's success. That was the teacher.

Evelyn: Oh absolutely. If all things were equal, parent requests for teachers would stop. They wouldn't be a big deal. It is when there is a discrepancy in performance that parent requests become a real issue. (taped conversation, May 5, 1999)

Evelyn and I take the cover off the secret of staff performance in our conversations with one another because we are both positioned as educators. Yet professional, as well as moral and ethical, constraints prevented the same uncovering of the open secret of staff performance in Evelyn's conversations with parents about class placements.

I wondered if in my individual conversations with Stella and Donna, positioned as researcher and participant, rather than educator and parent, and focussed on processes of class placements rather than on specific educators or specific choices between educators, the open secret of staff performance would continue to be kept or if the open secret would be uncovered.

Here's how my conversation went with Donna:

Debbie: The other thing that often comes up in all of this is that whole sense of this is about performance evaluations. So, when I come in and say well I'd really like Mr. X to be Cohen's teacher, am I then making a judgment about quality of teaching?

Donna: What I sort of have to think about is when Karen, my oldest, went into her class, I don't know that I'd ever seen her teacher before. With Patti, she went into grade three. I was really praying she would go into the same class Lauren had for three because I thought that teacher was a saint. She didn't. She went into a different class and she has had a great year. She loves her teacher. As far as the different teaching styles, they're both excellent. They're different. I know of an instance where a parent has asked to have their child not in a class. There was a personality problem between the mother and the teacher. She didn't specify which of the other teachers she wanted, just, 'Please not in that class.' I know that request was honored. I guess that's something that Evelyn needs to deal with if that situation comes up. I would hope that it wouldn't come up very often (taped conversation, February 22, 2000)

Here's how my conversation went with Stella:

Debbie: When requests start to happen, if there are high requests for two or three classrooms, let's say, and not for one other, teachers can feel they are in a popularity contest and that creates a sense of uneasiness with staff. It takes you into a whole other issue, which is staff performance.

Stella: I believe there should be an evaluation. Evaluation's just so important. I think Evelyn does a great job with her staff with her

> own inservices and learning [times] and making it possible for staff to go to sessions in other places (taped conversation, January 3, 2000).

Looking Beyond the Images

A parent participant in Benson's doctoral study writes,

> "There is a line that parents are expected NOT to step over, i.e. to question is to condemn."...
>
> Parents are not expected to question how a teacher delivers the curriculum, or to (positively) suggest how any extracurricular activity might run differently, or to be concerned with reporting practices, or to question any aspect of the autonomy of the teacher or the administrator. They are the "professionals" and parents are not.... (Benson, 1999, p. 140)

As Evelyn said, there are some things you can't put out there. She knows it. Susan, the parent in Benson's study, knows it. Obviously, Donna and Stella know it too. They saw the line and they didn't cross it.

When I directly asked Donna about whether she feels a parent request for a teacher is a judgment of a teacher's performance, she stayed on this side of the line. She framed her thoughts around teaching styles and personality conflicts between teacher and parent, rather than staff performance. She positioned Evelyn on the other side of the line by acknowledging those issues were Evelyn's to deal with.

When I directly stated to Stella parent requests take us into the realm of staff performance, she stayed on this side of the line as well. She spoke of the importance of performance evaluations and opportunities for professional growth. She, too, positioned Evelyn on the other side of the line by acknowledging what a great job Evelyn does in this area.

With staff performance, Donna and Stella both clearly see the line between parents and the administrator and they consciously choose not to cross it. Evelyn is positioned on one side of the line with staff performance situated on her ground. Donna and Stella, as parents, are positioned on the other side of the line. While they discuss teaching styles, parent/teacher personality conflicts, or professional development, they do not discuss staff performance. Is it because they see the open secret of staff performance belonging to Evelyn? Is it because they are responding to Evelyn as I did with Mom, and Dawne? With Mom, because the cancer was hers, she decided whether her dying was going to be an open secret or not. With Dawne, because the cancer is hers, she decided whether her hair loss was going to be an open secret or not. Does Evelyn own the open secret of staff performance? Is it her secret to keep or uncover?

It seems that Evelyn is caught behind the line. Caught by professional, as well as moral and ethical, obligations. Caught by the complexities and contradictions. How does she honor parent requests when she knows parents are inadvertently involved in a process of staff evaluation, selecting the teachers perceived to be the 'good' teachers? How does she invite "genuine partnership" and "responsible participation" when she has information important to class placement decisions, information about staff performance, which she is keeping secret? How does she move away from requesting parents' dependent trust when she can't discuss openly all aspects of class placement decisions? How does she honor parent participation and the open secret of staff performance in the same process?

Another layer of wonders surfaces. Is parent voice the same as making a request for a specific teacher? Do they invite different possibilities? Is parent voice about children different from parent voice about teachers? Do they invite different possibilities?

I think again about my friend Sue and the way the members of her school council made sense of these wonders. How would Evelyn, Donna and Stella respond to these wonders if they had a chance to talk about them together? What possibilities might they imagine?

Relationships
Building blocks of

CHAPTER VI
PARENT INVOLVEMENT

The bands of color – the 'blues,' 'reds,' 'purples' – and now the 'oranges,' separate out of my research experiences. They seize my attention. They captivate my thoughts. They fill me with wonders. Parent involvement and participation create a broad band; a bold streak of 'oranges' across the school landscape. A strong image emerges of parents positioned as volunteers.

With the beginning of the 2000/2001 school year, I received from my sons' school a parent volunteer form. The form reads:

> **Dear Parents,**
>
> **Parent volunteers are an integral part of your child's school day. If you are able to volunteer please fill out this form and return it as soon as possible.**
>
> **Thank you for your support.**

The form has a number of categories of parent volunteer activities. Under "Clerical Assistance," I can choose to laminate, type, xerox or put up displays. Under "Tutor or Classroom Assistance," I can choose to help a small group of students or individual students. I can indicate my interest in volunteering in the "Library," "Publishing Centre," "Music Room," or in providing "Computer Assistance." Further, I can choose to babysit in my home for parents volunteering during school time or to do work at home.

I have to smile as I sit and read the form. I received the same form from the school last year. I received a form almost identical to this one from Cohen's previous school, each of the four years he was registered there. The story of parent involvement seems to be a well known one.

In looking at the tasks listed on the parent volunteer form I received, I wonder how volunteers "are an integral part of [my] child's school day." If parent volunteers are doing clerical work, or shelving books in the library, or working in the publishing centre, how are they integral to my child's school day? It is rare my children mention a parent volunteer, and those occasions tend to be in relation to field trips or special classroom activities. I wonder if the note meant to say, "Parent volunteers are an integral part of the teachers' school day."

I received a second note from the school during opening, this one from the chair of my children's school council. The parent chairperson, acknowledging it is difficult for many parents to attend school council meetings, asked parents to provide direction to the council through a survey. She noted, "The responses will be tabulated and tabled at the October meeting. We will use this information to help us set our goals for the 2000-2001 school year." Seven items were listed for which I could circle 'yes' or 'no' in response. The items ranged from whether parents would be willing to spend $50 per family at the beginning of the school year to pay the crossing guard who supervises the crosswalk, to whether we would support a staff appreciation luncheon, to whether we would be interested in sessions for parents or parent-led sessions. I think again of the parents in Benson's (1998) study who felt they were limited to discussing "fund-raising, social events, and plumbing" (p. 11) in their school council meetings. I think again of the various ways parents were involved in activities on the Gardenview landscape.

Snapshot

> *Susan sits at a computer, her fingers poised on the keyboard. A spreadsheet is visible on her screen with the headings* ***Title*** *and* ***Job Description*** *appearing in bold print in the first two columns. Spread on the table beside the monitor are teacher questionnaires from which Susan is entering data into her spreadsheet.*

Memorybank Movie

In my first meeting with Kris she identified, as one of the goals of the school council, the establishment of a parent volunteer system. She felt such a system would enhance the sense of community among parents and would ensure all parents knew what was happening at the school, where they could help, and how they could get involved. Susan volunteered to take on the job of coordinating the system and Kris planned to form a committee at the December school council meeting to assist Susan.

Kris's aim was to have a draft parent volunteer system ready to share with parents in January and a formalized package ready for school opening next September (field notes, November 27, 1998).

At the December school council meeting, Kris introduced the parent volunteer system and spoke of how this could be parents' "gift to the school." Susan outlined the information she needed regarding what volunteer jobs are currently being done, what those jobs entail and how much time they take. Susan explained, by specifying tasks clearly, those parents who want to help but don't know how to get involved will be given an opening. Kris then asked for volunteers to serve on the committee (field notes, December 2, 1998).

As a result of the December meeting, a committee was formed. Susan, Kris and one other parent worked to define the volunteer tasks being done by parents at Gardenview. Jobs listed on their spreadsheet included items such as art display coordinator, pictures' day assistants, hot lunch coordinator, teacher appreciation coordinator, grade six farewell committee members, photocopier assistants and library assistants (parent volunteer spreadsheet, undated). At the January school council meeting, Susan distributed the spreadsheet to parents and asked for response. She also shared a draft "teacher questionnaire" which would garner teacher input into the volunteer organization system.

> **Dear [Gardenview] School Teacher,**
> **We, the Parent Volunteer Committee, are in the process of establishing several parent volunteer sub-committees, each to perform specific ongoing tasks or organize special events throughout the year.**
>
> **As one of our goals is to set up a committee of parents whose objective is to "lighten the load" of the teachers, we would like to establish what the needs of you, the teacher, are. What daily tasks, if performed by a parent volunteer, would allow you more time to spend on the high priority jobs that only you can do? Whether it be photocopying, preparing materials, typing, please indicate below what your needs are.**
>
> **Name of teacher:**
>
> ____

> **Classroom tasks you would like to see performed by a parent:**
>
> ____
>
> ____
>
> ____
>
> ____
>
> **We hope to build a system of volunteerism that will enhance the school experience for students and teachers alike….**
>
> **Sincerely,**
> **[Gardenview] Parent Volunteer Committee**
> **(Teacher Questionnaire, January 20, 1999)**

In concluding the conversation about the parent volunteer system, Kris shared her belief that a further strength of the volunteer organization system lays in recognizing those people who are doing jobs currently unknown to others and in providing assistance to those parent volunteers who are being overtaxed. Susan let parents know that once the volunteer list is finalized, it will go out to all parents at Gardenview.

Looking Beyond the Images

Seeing Small

When we look at the parent volunteer system through a lens that sees small, through the perspective of a system, we see parents assuming a place on the school landscape. Wanting to "lighten the load" of teachers, wanting to "enhance the school experience for students and teachers alike," parents offer to do those jobs—the photocopying, typing, materials preparation—which will enable teachers to do the "high priority jobs only [they] can do." Parents freely and generously offer this "gift to the school."

When I talked with Susan about the work of the committee to establish the parent volunteer system, she said,

> We were just basically trying to get the stay-at-home moms…in the door and just trying to show them the little jobs…. [T]he teachers went to university and they know what they should be teaching…. I don't believe [we] should have any say in that as parent[s]. …I believe there are some jobs

> that could be beneficial for parents to do to help in the school. I'd rather be the mom. (taped conversation, April 8, 1999).[39]

Attending to the generalities of teacher and parent positioning, Susan claimed a place on the landscape of the school—the place of an involved mom who supports the development of classroom relationships between children, teachers and the curriculum.

Seeing Big

When I look at the parent volunteer system big, when I attend to the details and particularities, one situation comes clearly to mind. In mid-September, 1999, after the volunteer spreadsheet was shared with Gardenview parents and volunteers offered to take on specific tasks, Evelyn asked members of the art display committee to change some displays. When I arrived at the school after lunch, Sarah, the school secretary, greeted me with the words, "There's been an invasion of parents. Boy, does [Evelyn] have news for you!" My curiosity piqued, I went in search of Evelyn. Sitting in her office, Evelyn explained, "It's about the volunteer organization. I was ready to jump!" That morning, while Evelyn was out at a meeting, members of the art display committee came in to do their work. As well as changing the art in the picture frames, they rearranged pictures on walls and they rearranged the atrium, moving the puppet theatre to a new location, shifting displays of books and artifacts, changing the arrangement of learning centres, and creating an altered flow of movement and visibility throughout this central area of the school. Evelyn was astounded at what took place. She commented, "We have always had good co-operation from parents. They have always shown respect for our work. How would they react if we went into their homes and rearranged their living rooms?" (field notes, September 15, 1999). There was apparently a misunderstanding between parents and Evelyn about the job description of the committee. While parents saw their role as one of participation and influence, Evelyn saw it as one of "lightening the load" for educators.

Parents often feel that schools do not value their input on important

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[39] While this study does not address issues of gender, I acknowledge that the typical work done by parent volunteers is done by women.

> matters…. Common complaints include the attitude that teachers want parents to only do menial tasks and that decision making is better off in the hands of educators. Clerical work, fundraising, and being a room parent are the typical roles that parents in general are assigned. (Rockwell, Andre, & Hawley, 1995, p. 57)

In a later conversation with Evelyn about parent involvement, she helps us see the complexity between the known script, as lived in her embodied response to parents' rearranging of the atrium, and a new story of parents. As we began to explore a basic question, "What do schools need?", Evelyn reflected,

> Maybe we need to reframe that question. …If we look at what schools need, we talk about laminating, we talk about answering the phone, we talk about filing. Maybe the basic question has to change. Maybe we should say, "What do children in schools need?" The other part of the question is, "What do parents need?" We have to expand that question a little bit more…. [Parents] want to be involved in a meaningful way, I would say…. If [they] get nothing back, then what's the point? …I think it is just that we are not at that awareness level. I think if administrators and teachers had the time to talk about this, and look at it, we would see it differently. I think we're just not taking the time for it and that's why it's not happening. I think it's just a conversation that's not taking place. (taped conversation, September 27, 1999)

It is a conversation not taking place between teachers and principals. It is a conversation not taking place between parents and educators. It is a conversation which would enable Evelyn and members of the art display committee to search for possibilities which attend to all three questions, "What does the school need?", "What do children in the school need?" and, "What do parents need?".

It is a conversation that would enable parents and teachers, and teachers and administrators, to explore questions about rights, equality, and empowerment, as well as the reciprocity inherent in the question, "What do parents need?" (Wolfendale, 1992). Returning to Benson's words, I wonder about rights. Are parents "included as a part of the life of the school because it is convenient or useful to have them there"? Or, are parents "there 'by right, so much a part of the action that is impossible to exclude them' (Beare, 1993, p. 207)" (Benson, 1999, p. 48)? Reflecting on Wolfendale's words, I wonder about equality. Is there "equal status between parents and professionals, with dialogue between [those] who have a common and vested interest in children, [recognizing] that each brings different but equivalent experience and expertise to that joint enterprise" (Wolfendale, 1992, p. 3)? I also wonder about empowerment. Are there opportunities "for parents themselves to learn, to grow, to explore possibilities, to become familiar with…schools…, and to become enabled and confident not only to work within [this] system, but, as appropriate and where necessary, to challenge existing structures and traditions" (p. 3)?

Seeing Kris and Susan big, attending to their earnestness in wanting their involvement to be a 'gift to the school,' a gift which 'lightens the load' of teachers, I believe what they need, if we were to ask the question "What do these parents need?", is for their gift to be accepted. What they gain from their involvement we can only surmise, but I think the satisfaction of knowing they have 'enhanced the school experience for students and teachers' is a large piece of it. There is a mutuality in the gift they are offering.

Seeing the members of the art display committee big, attending to their 'gift' of rearranging the atrium, I see no mutuality in the gift they offered. It was viewed as a gift given outside of the circumscribed boundaries of their positioning as parents. It was a gift the parents were not perceived as having the right to offer. It causes me to wonder, "Is a gift from parents tied to the ground on which they stand?"

On what ground do parents stand in relation to the school landscape? From Susan and Kris, and from the volunteer form from my children's school, we see that parents stand on the ground of clerical assistance, and of coordinating extra-curricular events. From earlier chapters, we see that parents stand on the ground of fundraising and advocacy, of audience and spectator. From earlier chapters and from the experience of the art display committee, we see how tentative parents' positioning is on the ground of voice into decisions which affect teaching and learning, decisions such as class placements and physical environment. Who owns the ground on which parents stand? Who owns the ground outside of parents' circumscribed boundaries?

Returning to the question, "What do parents need?", and seeing the art display committee big, I wonder, what do these parents gain from changing the pictures in the frames and displays? Is their contribution convenient and useful or do they have a rightful place on the school landscape? Are they engaged in a joint enterprise in which they can bring their experience and expertise to bear? Are they positioned to learn and grow, to work confidently within the system, to challenge the system knowledgeably? Do these parents need more ground to stand on? Do these parents need to share ownership of the ground?

Evelyn says,

> I think if administrators and teachers had the time to talk about this, and look at it, we would see it differently.... I think it's just a conversation that's not taking place. (taped conversation, September 27, 1999)

As parents and educators, as teachers and principals, will we make time for these hard conversations? Will these hard conversations take place?

Who decides?

Snapshot

> *Rachel stands in the foyer, beside a table piled high with pizza boxes and bags of individual salads. Around her sit large tubs labelled with teachers' names, small milk containers visible in the bottom. Parents stand beside the tubs, each with a master list of hot lunch orders in their hands. Rachel is handing boxes and bags of food to the parents who are filling the large blue tubs.*

Memorybank Movie

Rachel, or "hot lunch lady" as the children called her, coordinated monthly hot lunches at Gardenview for three years. Her involvement in the hot lunch program first began at another school where they needed helpers.

> ...because I was a real neophyte then, I didn't know anything about how to help at school. The moms who did hot lunch seemed to have things well under control so I just thought, "I'll take a back seat and learn."...I just went on as the sort of helper who was eventually to take over. I knew what I was doing so I decided I might as well do Gardenview's hot lunch program too. (taped conversation, August 31, 1999)

Rachel's contribution as hot lunch coordinator was a large one. She first met with Evelyn to set a date which did not conflict with other school activities. She then decided what the hot lunch was going to be and organized it with a supplier. Once the supplier was booked, Rachel established the prices and made up the hot lunch order forms. Forms were distributed to the students and were collected by the teachers as they were returned. Rachel had parent volunteers come in one morning to tally lunch orders and count money. When they were finished, she completed a master order form, faxed her order to the supplier and made a bank deposit. Just before hot lunch day, she purchased extra items for the lunches, such as potato chips, apples, or juice boxes, at the grocery store. The morning of hot lunch, she visited the supplier to pick up napkins and condiments and filled the blue tubs with the extra items. When the food was delivered, parent volunteers filled the lunch orders for each class and headed to the classrooms to distribute the lunches and supervise the children. Rachel stayed in the community kitchen where she dealt with any problems that arose and filled late lunch orders. Altogether, Rachel spent the better part of a week each month, in bits and pieces and blocks of time, coordinating the monthly hot lunch (taped conversation, August 31, 1999).

Positioning myself as parent volunteer, I joined the parade with Rachel and the other parents, counting money and tallying lunch orders on count day and distributing lunches to a classroom on hot lunch day. The morning of the count, the workroom table was filled with parents working while preschool children played together on the floor. More parents were working at the tables in the staffroom while preschool children colored and flipped through books. Parents chatted freely with one another and helped themselves to coffee in the staffroom (field notes, September 24, 1999).

On hot lunch day, minutes before lunch time, the atrium flooded with parents. Obviously experienced at this process, parents moved to the large blue tubs, reviewed the class order form, double checked the items already in the tub, and waited for the food order to arrive and be distributed. As soon as the pizza truck pulled up, parents hurried the piles of boxes and bags down to the atrium. Rachel quickly handed them out and parents rushed off with the tubs to the classrooms. There was an intense whirlwind of activity for about twenty minutes and then the atrium was empty and quiet. Many of the parent volunteers had purchased lunches for themselves and their preschoolers and joined their children for lunch in the classrooms. A few students, parents and staff passed through to talk with Rachel in the community kitchen. As the lunch period was ending, Evelyn made an announcement over the intercom thanking parents for their help with the hot lunch. She asked the children to give a cheer for the parents and led them in chanting "hip hip hooray" (field notes, May 21, 1999).

Rachel felt very positive about her role as "hot lunch lady." As a parent, she saw how much the children looked forward to it and how much fun it was for them. Although it was a lot of work for her, she said it was fun for her too and for the other parents who helped. She believed the hot lunch program added something significant to the children's school experience which "is definitely a parent role" to provide (taped conversation, August 31, 1999).

Looking Beyond the Images

Seeing Small

When we look at the hot lunch program small, through the perspective of a system, we see parents assuming a place on the school landscape. Wanting to add something significant to the children's school experience, parents proposed and established a hot lunch program. The hot lunch program is completely parent run, other than teachers' distribution and collection of order forms. Parents freely and generously offer this 'gift' to the children.

When I talked with Rachel about her work as hot lunch coordinator, she said,

> I'm from a family of educators and I just see how much more is being dumped on teachers, more and more and more. I wonder if parents are stepping in more to the valuable roles that a teacher can play....I feel [parents] are usurping [teachers'] role and maybe diminishing it in the greater timeline of things.... I have very grave misgivings...so where there's help in the classroom I really see great roles for parents but I see some dangers there too. So doing hot lunch is definitely a parent role. (taped conversation, August 31, 1999)

Attending to the generalities of teacher and parent positioning, Rachel claimed a place on the landscape of school—a clearly defined parent place of providing lunch for children.

Seeing Big

Seeing Rachel's contribution as hot lunch coordinator big, attending to the details and particularities, we see that it has more than one dimension to it. While Rachel talked about her fear of parent involvement diminishing the role of teachers, a comment which speaks to me about teachers' professional knowledge, she also recognized her own knowledge as a parent.

> Even today, I was looking as I dropped off my children at school and they hopped out of the van and they were walking away. When they're in the van you're saying, "I love you! Have a great day." Kisses all round, just cherishing who they are. So excited on the second day of school. You're watching them walk off and then you turn to look at the traffic. A moment later you just look to give a final wave or just to see that they're all right and all of a sudden they're part of the throng. And I'm suddenly feeling to

> myself, "Oh, I hope their new teachers recognize their individuality!" And you feel like sort of writing this letter, "I know sometimes he can be a bit like this but I hope you see this and on and on." (taped conversation, August 31, 1999)

Rachel saw her involvement as a choice between staying in a clearly defined parent place within the school or treading the dangerous ground of providing support to teachers within the classroom. Rachel did not talk about a positioning on the landscape of the school which would enable her to use her parent knowledge of children, or of teaching and learning. She did not talk about a positioning which would enable her to lay her parent knowing beside teacher knowing to enhance the educational experiences of children.

When there are tasks that need to be done in a school to afford teachers more time to work with students, when there is a need for funds, when there is a need for advocacy for public education, parents are called upon to fulfil this need. While it is accepted that this is not the best use of educators' time, it is not similarly accepted that this may not be the best use of parents' time. Are parent volunteers the only solution to these issues? Should the position of parents, as holders of "funds of knowledge for teaching" (Moll et al., in Shockley, Michalove & Allen, 1995, p. 13) be a much more integral one on the school landscape? Should we begin to look for possibilities, other than the use of parent volunteers, to address these issues?

Some parents choose to do the tasks educators deem necessary and see their contribution as a gift to the school. Other parents choose to do the tasks which add the extras to students' school experiences and see their contribution as a gift to the students. The hot lunch program is a gift to children which falls within the circumscribed boundaries of parents' ground. What would happen if parents selected a gift for children which did not fall within these circumscribed boundaries?

Where in schools is the ground which enables parents to choose to use their parent knowledge—rightfully, equally, reciprocally and ably?

Who decides?

Snapshot

> *Terry is standing at a table in the gym, soil laden newspaper spread in front of her. One side of the table is covered with clay pots, with handpainted stars and the words "Class of '99" shimmering in the bright light. Beside the table is a cart filled with plants. Terry is carefully transferring a plant into each clay pot.*

Memorybank Movie

I first met Terry the day of the grade six farewell. Although I had seen her at Gardenview previously, we had not connected before. As I watched Terry repotting plants, decorating the gym, consulting with Evelyn and responding to parents' questions, I learned Terry was the parent chair of the grade six farewell committee.

The grade six farewell became a special event at Gardenview School, following a tradition established three years previous. This year, parents talked with Evelyn about the farewell in April and called the first meeting in May. A committee of interested parents formed at that time. Evelyn selected a date for the celebration and the committee brainstormed a theme. Every parent on the committee took responsibility for one main job—creating the memory book, purchasing the clay pots, getting the plants, ordering tables, chairs, tablecloths—while Evelyn established the program for the evening, in collaboration with the grade six teachers, and purchased the gifts for the departing students. Many tasks, like painting the pots, decorating the gym, and cleaning up, were done by the committee as a whole. All parents contributed to the potluck dinner (taped conversation, June 28, 1999).

The grade six farewell was a beautiful, emotional celebration. The gym walls were decorated with student artwork and the tables were set with plants and candles, mementos for the grade six students. Large indoor plants sparkled with white lights and balloon bouquets swayed brightly throughout the gym. Soft music and candle light added a feel of significance to the evening. Watching the parade of students, listening to their voices as they sang a song for their parents, seeing families talking and laughing over dinner, seeing the students receive their certificates and memory books, I was struck by the thoughtfulness, the time and attention given this occasion. The sense of how precious a gift this was from parents and teachers to their children/ students became palpable (field notes, June 23, 1999).

Terry, reflecting on her role on the grade six farewell committee, like Rachel, said it was a lot of work but it was rewarding. "I have only one child and this is so much fun to do. I'm never going to get this opportunity again" (taped conversation, June 28, 1999). Terry noted how the grade six farewell was important as a significant moment in her daughter's growing up and as a time of goodbyes for herself too.

> I'm leaving everybody here and that really bothers me. I won't be able to come and sit here on the couch and be a part of things, and for four years this has been part of my life, not just my daughter's but a part of mine also. (taped conversation, June 28, 1999)

Looking Beyond the Images

Seeing Small

When we look at the tasks of the grade six farewell committee through a lens that sees small, through the perspective of a system, we see parents assuming a place on the school landscape. Wanting to mark the passage of their children from elementary school to junior high school, wanting to create a memorable goodbye, parents plan and facilitate a celebration with the principal. Parents and educators freely offer this gift to the children.

When I talked with Terry about the work of the grade six farewell committee, she said,

> I don't think parents here leave it up to the school and leave it up to the teachers to ensure things are done. They don't. And I don't think parents or the teachers expect that. I think at this particular school it's the parents and the children and the teachers…everybody is involved. Definitely parents get involved. (taped conversation, June 28, 1999)

Attending to the generalities of teacher and parent positioning, Terry claimed a place on the landscape of the school—the place of a parent volunteer who wanted to see certain things get done.

Seeing Big

Seeing Terry's contribution as chair of the grade six farewell committee big, attending to the details and particularities, we see that it has more than one dimension to it. While Terry talked about wanting to ensure things got done, she also talked about her place at Gardenview as a parent.

> Parents are an important part of this community. I got that feeling when I came over here and the principal walked my daughter and me through. It was an immediate welcome and so for four years, this is where I've been, every day. An immediate welcome. Immediate. And that's why I think you see so many parents here. Last year, I worked in the office pretty well every day with the secretary and that's when I really learned to know the teachers. And they weren't just teachers anymore, they were friends. (taped conversation, June 28, 1999)

It was working in relationship that was important to Terry. In literature on parents and schools, partnerships are cited as the ultimate relationship between parents and educators. Shockley, Michalove and Allen (1995) write,

> [P]artnerships develop. A genuine partnership is constructed jointly by all the participants. Each participant has the responsibility to commit to both individual and shared goals. Rather than growing bigger, in terms of more people doing the same program, partnerships grow more intimate. Rather than stabilizing into set program elements, partnerships remain unstable and dynamic, changing with the needs of any member. There is no right way to develop a partnership because that would imply a single model. There is a constant negotiation of the relationship. (p. 92)

Wolfendale's conception of partnership includes as integral the key principles of rights, equality, reciprocity and empowerment (1983, 1992). Bastiani adds the importance of partnerships being "rooted in joint action," of parents, students and professionals working together to get things done (David, 1993, p. 156). Swap, drawing heavily on the work of Epstein, further adds that partnerships are based on long-term commitments and "widespread involvement of families and educators in many levels of activities" (1993, p. 47).

In Benson's study, parents concerns about being limited to involvement in issues of "fundraising, social events and plumbing" cause me to wonder again about whether parents are 'included as a part of the life of the school because it is convenient or useful to have them there' or whether parents are there 'by right,' as partners, 'so much a part of the action that it is impossible to exclude them.' Martha, a parent in another research study,

> does not view the present relationship between her home and the school as a "partnership." She believes that she does everything that is asked of her but that this does not necessarily imply "partnership."
>
> (Translated from Spanish) When I have expressed my opinions they have helped me but in reality there is no partnership. I follow what the school tells me to do, what the school asks of me. It's as if I were also a student in the school. (McCaleb, 1994, p. 90)

In her role as chair of the grade six farewell committee, was Terry in partnership with Evelyn and the grade six teachers or was she, like Martha, doing what the school asked of her? Did being friends with the teachers, did wanting to give the gift of the grade six farewell to the students, did being welcomed into the school make her more a partner with educators and less a volunteer of convenience? Were her needs, as well as those of the students' and the school's, met? Was she engaged in a joint enterprise in which she could bring her experience and expertise to bear? Was she positioned to learn and grow, to work confidently within the system, to challenge the system knowledgeably?

Was Terry an invited guest or a rightful participant?

Who decided?

CHAPTER VII
PARENT PARTICIPATION IN CURRICULUM

Another band of color separates out from my research experiences—the 'yellows' of parent participation in curriculum. As I lay the classic children's story of The Secret Garden (Burnett, 1911) beside Gardenview's secret garden story, I explore the kingdoms, mystery, magic, trust, relationships and invitations present in both stories. I attend to these aspects of the stories through a lens that sees small and a lens that sees big.

Right from the beginning of my research year, Evelyn and I talked about the breadth and depth of parent involvement at Gardenview. Evelyn acknowledged that parents on their school landscape fulfill all the roles typical to parent volunteers: "audience, spectators, fund raisers, aides and organizers" (McGilp & Michael, 1994, p. 2). She asserted, though, "if you're really in a partnership and if you really believe parents have a very important role to play in the education of their children, they have to know what the curriculum is" (taped conversation, October 29, 1998). Evelyn told me of how the staff at Gardenview ensure all parents receive Alberta Learning's Curriculum Handbook for Parents for the grade levels in which they have children enrolled. She mentioned some teachers send out parent inventories to learn about parents' interests and areas of expertise (taped conversation, October 29, 1998). In this early conversation, Evelyn's comments about parents and curriculum focused on ensuring parents knew the curriculum and had opportunities to be involved.

At this time I was questioning whether parent involvement in curriculum was different from other kinds of parent involvement. Is reading to a group of children or coaching a group of young readers a different positioning for a parent than photocopying curriculum materials? Is carving pumpkins with a small group and doing math activities with the seeds a different positioning than shopping for materials for an art project? In typical forms of involvement, parents carry out the tasks that educators deem important. When parents work with small groups of children in a classroom, when they come in to speak about their careers, when they are 'guest' facilitators during a lesson, are parents positioned differently or are they still just carrying out tasks educators deem important?

I think again about Benson's examination of the words involvement and participation. It seems parents are **involved** in curriculum—rolled into or enveloped somehow in the system; co-opted or brought into the curriculum act by teachers. But are parents **participants** in curriculum—individuals with a rightful part in curriculum delivery (1999, p. 48)? Would it be fair to assume someone 'having a **part** in' is a **part**ner? A "[s]harer (*with* person, *in* or *of* thing)," a "[p]erson associated with others in business of which he shares risks and profits; ~ (one who engages jointly)" (The Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1976, p. 804)? Are parents currently partners with teachers in curriculum endeavors? Benson (1999) writes,

> Although on paper the…education system describes parents as "partners" (Province of British Columbia, undated), my previous experiences as a teacher, school principal, and now a district administrator have made me realize that many parents feel ignored and shut out, or patronized and brushed-off. They feel much more like poor cousins than equal partners in their relations with the education system. Margaret was one of the first parents I interviewed…. Her words about the rhetoric of "parents as partners" echoed with me throughout my writing. "Some parents question …is it just words? Is it just hollow words?" (Margaret, interview, December 1995). (p. 6)

Involvement, being enveloped somehow in the system to do what educators deem important, does not make parents partners with teachers. Could participation, being given a rightful place in curriculum, shift parents' positioning in relation to the school landscape?

In Cohen's grade two year, I accompanied his grade two/three class on a rocks and minerals field trip to the Provincial Museum. When we arrived, parent volunteers were paired up by Cohen's teacher and assigned to a learning station. At our station, Nick and I were given a booklet by a museum facilitator who told us the main concepts we would 'teach' the students. Our group of students waited as we were briefed. Throughout the afternoon, I remember thinking, "This is what it must be like to be a substitute teacher!" The feeling of being unprepared was uncomfortable. How much better I could have facilitated the 'lesson' if I had read the material in advance, if I knew what the objectives were, if I had time to plan how I would actively engage children, if I had time to determine what I would do to accommodate students. That afternoon, I was a parent **involved** in the grade three science curriculum—a parent co-opted into the curriculum by Cohen's teacher and the museum facilitators. I was not a parent participant—a "sharer" of curriculum knowledge and objectives or instructional strategies.

The feeling of being co-opted was not mine alone. Nick, new to Canada from Lebanon, spoke and read English with a heavy accent. Keen to play a part, he struggled to articulate words so the children could understand his explanations and directions. Throughout the afternoon, he asked me to read words from the booklet, quickly repeating them again and again to master the pronunciation. On the bus ride home, Nick spoke of his work with stone in Lebanon. He spoke about his projects, described vividly the color and feel of the stone, explained techniques to cut the stone and to work with it. I thought how different this field trip could have been for both Nick and the children if Nick had been given the chance to **participate**—to tell his stories and share his knowledge, to read the rocks and minerals material in advance, connecting his knowing with the curricular concepts, and becoming comfortable with the English words that would enable him to express his knowing.

This interest in parent participation in curriculum prompted me to follow the secret garden project unfolding at Gardenview. There was a large, fenced, overgrown area just outside the school. It was intended to be a garden space or a green space for children but was currently unused. Evelyn hoped the space could be developed as an environmental classroom. She also hoped it could be a place which enabled parents to participate in curriculum—a place which gave them a voice and a part to play in the teaching and learning which would happen there.

> I don't know where the secret garden project is going to go, or how much involvement it's going to take, but I know we definitely will get some parents involved for certain in the planning of it.... This project will be an in for those parents who want to get involved in curriculum kinds of things.... In fact, I think this garden project is an example of how we can get parents involved in a meaningful way without being too intrusive. Because some teachers figure they have enough to do with planning their own program. I just don't know how many would really bite off planning with parents. But I think, through a project like this, it opens up some rich possibilities. (taped conversation, March 3, 1999)[40]

Intrigued by Evelyn's choice of the name 'secret garden' for the environmental classroom and wondering if there were parallels between the children's classic The Secret Garden (Burnett, 1911) and the project at Gardenview, I sat down to read the book. In the story, a young orphaned girl, Mary, is sent from India to live with her uncle in England. His manor is surrounded by a courtyard and a multitude of gardens. Mary is left to amuse herself. She is encouraged to play in the gardens but is told there is one garden that is all locked up and no one is to go inside. She learns that when her uncle's wife died suddenly ten years before, he locked up her garden and buried the key.

Mary, fascinated by this locked garden, searches for the hidden doorway and for the key to the door. Finally she finds the key in a small pile of soil. The next day, the wind blows the ivy aside and reveals the doorway. Mary slips the key into the lock and pushes open the door into the secret garden.

Mary loves the garden immediately. She loves that she can come inside it any time she wants. It is "a world all her own" (p. 95). She pulls away the grass and weeds choking out the fresh shoots. She plants flower seeds in new beds. She enters and leaves the garden carefully to prevent being seen because she wants to protect her "secret kingdom" (p. 99).

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[40] In our conversations at that time, Evelyn and I were not distinguishing between 'involvement' and 'participation' but were using the words interchangeably to mean 'a meaningful part in.'

When Dickon, her housemaid's young brother, offers to help her plant seeds, she is in turmoil. "Could you keep a secret, if I told you one? It's a great secret. I don't know what I should do if any one found it out. I believe I should die!" (Burnett, 1911, p. 120). When Dickon assures her he will keep her secret, she invites him into the secret garden.

During their days in the secret garden, Mary discovers her uncle has a sickly son Colin and she befriends him. While she and Dickon discuss inviting Colin into the secret garden, Mary is reluctant. "I found the key and got in two weeks ago. But I daren't tell you—I daren't because I was so afraid I couldn't trust you—*for sure*!" (p. 227).

Colin, entranced by "the mystery surrounding the garden" (p. 245), assures Mary he will keep the secret. He is overcome by the "magic" of the garden and vows he will get well in this special place.

At work in the garden, the three children are discovered by an old gardener. Colin speaks to him sharply, "We did not want you but now you will have to be in the secret" (p. 269). Learning of the old man's fondness for the garden, they invite him to work with them.

"…in the months that followed—the wonderful months—the radiant months—the amazing ones. Oh! the things which happened in that garden!" (p. 282). The plants flourish and so does Colin. When Colin's father returns from his travels abroad, he decides to visit the locked garden. He is amazed to find his son running in the garden and "glowing with life" (p. 353). "It was the garden that did it—and Mary and Dickon and the creatures—and the Magic," (p. 354) Colin tells his father. The secret garden is no longer a secret, and neither is the magic that happened there—the magic of "agreeable determinedly courageous" (p. 339) thoughts.

> At first people refuse to believe that a strange new thing can be done, then they begin to hope it can be done, then they see it can be done—then it is done and all the world wonders why it was not done centuries ago. (p. 337)

Now that I've told Burnett's story of The Secret Garden, I tell my story of

Gardenview's secret garden and of parent participation in curriculum. My story, too, is a story of kingdoms, trust, invitations, mystery, relationships and the magic of powerful thoughts. My story, too, is a story of hoping a new thing can be done.

On the Gardenview Landscape

Snapshots

Heather, a parent on the secret garden team, stands facing a gathering of adults seated around the round tables in the library. Her face is lit with enthusiasm as she speaks to them. On the front of the handout she is holding up, the word **EarthKeepers** *can be glimpsed in large bold print. Copies of the handout can be seen in the hands of the individuals listening to Heather.*

Gardenview teachers Matt and Samantha are leaning over a table in the atrium with Katherine, another parent member of the secret garden team. Copies of a letter to parents are spread on the table in front of them. Katherine appears to be talking. Samantha is writing on her copy of the letter as she and Matt listen.

The sun is shining down on the freshly turned earth of the secret garden and on the many people who can be seen at work within it. In the foreground, two staff are standing ankle deep in the compost pile, shovels dug deep into the compost. Behind them, a father and male teacher can be seen raking pea gravel under the eaves of the school building. Over to the right, a family of four are on hands and knees packing soil around the roots of a tree positioned in a freshly dug hole. In the shade against the far wall of the school, three individuals are engaged in conversation, crouched low over the landscape blueprints. At the garden entrance, two young girls are struggling to carry a bucket of water toward some tiny plants peeking out along the secret garden fence. Just outside that same piece of fence, Evelyn and Sarah can be seen tending to a barbecue.

Memorybank Movie

Gardenview's secret garden story begins in much the same way as Burnett's, The Secret Garden. Their garden, like the one at Misselthwaite Manor, was surrounded by high walls—the brown brick walls of the school on one half of the perimeter and a tall wire mesh fence on the other. It, too, had a locked gate. The garden had become wild with weeds and tall grass because of lack of use and Matt, like Mary, spent many hours beating back the weeds and creating a space where seeds could be planted and fresh shoots tended.

Evelyn, Dleif, Matt and Samantha, four staff members excited by the possibility of creating a secret garden, talked together about how they could use this garden space as an environmental classroom, about how it could be an alternate space in which to pursue curriculum objectives, about how it could be a space for building community. They wrote proposals requesting funding as they searched for ways to translate their dream into a reality. No funding was forthcoming.

To gather more ideas and to explore funding possibilities further, Evelyn, and a fellow principal Jenny, met with a community garden specialist. The garden specialist shared stories of working in gardens and her discovery of "the power or the magic of gardens" (taped conversation, March 25, 1999). Just like Colin in Burnett's The Secret Garden, she spoke of "wonderful transformations, not only just in physical wellness but in attitude changes," which she saw when people joined her in the gardens. She asserted that building a garden is really a process of building community. The garden specialist talked about a project proposal she developed in conjunction with another organization and the possibility of Evelyn's and Jenny's schools becoming part of that project. The project would enable the school to reach into its school community and the community in which it is situated to identify interested people. A core group would form who would develop a process to take their knowledge and experience and transfer it to the children through classroom and garden activities (taped conversation, March 25, 1999).

While she was intrigued about becoming a part of the project, Evelyn acknowledged the garden specialist's project had not yet obtained funding. Wanting to ensure the school's secret garden project moved ahead, she pursued other possibilities. Just as Mary met Dickon and invited him to work in her garden, Evelyn connected with Heather, a parent of two Gardenview students. When Heather enrolled her children at Gardenview in December, she and Evelyn talked about Heather's PhD work—work related to environmental education. Knowing of Heather's interest and expertise in ecological sustainability and literacy, Evelyn shared the staff's hopes of creating the secret garden and invited Heather to participate in the project (taped conversation, August 31, 1999). Heather, excited by the staff's interest in creating a naturalized area within their garden, agreed to play a part.

Further, just as Mary met Colin in Burnett's story, Evelyn also connected with Katherine, another Gardenview parent. At the January school council meeting regarding a new volunteer organization system being developed, Katherine asked why none of the parent roles involved curriculum support but were primarily clerical support. Evelyn responded enthusiastically to Katherine's expressed interest in sharing her strengths and set up a meeting with her to talk further about possibilities for parent support of curriculum (field notes, January 19, 1999). In their follow-up meeting, Evelyn learned about Katherine's background as a soil scientist (taped conversation, February 3, 1999). Seeing her interest in curriculum involvement, Evelyn invited Katherine to play a part in the secret garden project. Katherine, able to share her expertise with soil, agreed to participate.

Wanting to open the gate to the secret garden to not just one or two parents but to broad parent participation, staff put a notice in the April newsletter inviting parents to a meeting about the environmental classroom.

Parent Evening—Environmental Classroom
Thursday Evening, April 15th - 7:00 p.m.

We are planning an evening of discussion for any parents who may be interested in helping us to achieve our goals with the Environmental Classroom. We will be looking at learner outcomes, possibilities for both an Indoor and Outdoor Secret Garden and a snapshot of an Environmental Initiative for [Gardenview] School. If

> **you have an interest in environmental education, gardens, science or the enhancement of our 'Outdoor Classroom', this meeting is for you.**
>
> **We need your support to make these projects come to life!**
>
> **(School newsletter, April, 1999)**

Because Heather was unable to attend the meeting on April 15th, she met with Evelyn, Dleif, Matt and Samantha the evening prior. Heather shared her knowledge of the planning and processes important to creating ownership of the secret garden by staff, students, parents and community members and to creating opportunities for everyone to be teachers and learners in this environmental space. Heather made links between the staff members' ideas and the criteria of project funders. Once the group decided on a theme and stages of implementation, Heather agreed to write a proposal for funding on behalf of the school (field notes, April 14, 1999).

The next evening Katherine alone met with Evelyn, Matt and Samantha. They reviewed the meeting held with Heather and continued to brainstorm ideas for the secret garden. Katherine spoke of soil testing and companion gardening. She volunteered to make contact with a landscape architect working in her office building and with a company to request a donation of compost. She recommended sending a letter out to the parent community asking if anyone had expertise with horticulture or gardening to bring to the project. Everyone left the meeting with some specific contacts to make or a task to do (field notes, April 15, 1999).

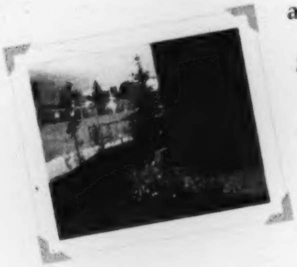
A great deal happened over the next two months. The community garden specialist met with the entire Gardenview staff to dispel any mystery surrounding the secret garden and to help develop and spread a vision for the project (field notes, April 29, 1999). Heather's proposal met with success and garnered funds for the project. Katherine procured donations of professional landscape plans and services, soil, manure and compost. The secret garden team (Heather, Katherine, Evelyn, Matt, Samantha and the landscape architect) met with parents at the May school council meeting to share project goals and to invite community participation (field notes, May 26, 1999). A letter went out to "community partners" on May 27, 1999 inviting donations of equipment and plant materials. A newsletter went home to parents inviting family involvement in secret garden workbees scheduled for Saturday and

Sunday, May 29th and 30th and Saturday and Sunday, June 12th and 13th (undated). Parents donated gardening tools and equipment, benches, birdbaths, rain barrels, trees, shrubs, perennials, bulbs, seeds and funds. The secret garden project was suddenly underway and gathering momentum.

A number of these events were captured in the three snapshots I shared. The first photo, of Heather addressing parents, was taken at the May school council meeting. Heather prepared a handout for parents based on the proposal she submitted and, as I mentioned, was sharing the goals of the project with parents. She spoke powerfully about environmental stewardship, a topic she is passionate about, and about how the garden was intended to provide a hands-on place for everyone—students, parents, community members and staff—to develop and extend their environmental literacy and their understanding of the connections between human health and environmental health. Heather shared a vision of the garden as a place where everyone would be involved in teaching and learning surrounding health and environmental outcomes (field notes, May 26, 1999), a place where the magic of "agreeable determinedly courageous" thoughts would bring walls down and would bring parents in to engage jointly in curriculum with teachers and students.

In the second photo, Katherine is working with Matt and Samantha to finalize the letters to parents and community members regarding possibilities for donations and participation. While Heather took a strong role in the development of the framework of the project—the vision, goals and outcomes, Katherine took a lead role in project management—the actual physical transformation of the plot of land in correspondence with the landscape blueprints. She directed the initial site preparation, both in the preplanning and throughout the workbees, and coordinated the gathering of the necessary site materials. Like Mary in The Secret Garden, Katherine (metaphorically) pulled away the weeds and grass choking out fresh shoots of possibility for the garden.

The third photo captures a moment during one of the workbees. Parents, children and staff were all hard at work in various capacities. There was an abundance of work to be done and it seemed that shovels, rakes and watering cans moved from one pair of hands to another all day long. People came and went throughout the day, helping when they could, getting some direction from Katherine, the landscape architect, Samantha or Matt as to what needed to be done. Just as the children in Burnett's story were entranced by the "magic" of the garden which was "always pushing and drawing and making things out of nothing" (Burnett, 1911, p. 287), so were the individuals, both adult and children, who came to work in Gardenview's secret garden. There was a spirit of enthusiasm, of anticipation, of camaraderie as the garden began to take form.



"...in the [days] that followed — the wonderful [days] — the radiant [days] — the amazing ones. Oh! the things which happened in that garden!" (Burnett, p. 282) The garden took shape according to the landscape plans. Trees, shrubs and bulbs were planted. The compost area was reconstructed. Garden plots were prepared for each class in the school. Teachers and children worked their soil, transplanted plants and personalized their plots. Benches and birdbaths were placed throughout the secret garden. An Inukshuk was built. Special events were held in the garden, and parents and guests were taken on walks to see it. A celebration was planned to honor all who had helped to make it happen. The magic of "agreeable determinedly courageous" thoughts (Burnett, 1911, p. 339) translated the dream of a secret garden into a reality.

Looking Beyond the Images

But had that same magic brought down the walls surrounding the secret garden of curriculum?

Two plotlines run parallel through Gardenview's secret garden story: first, the development of the garden itself and, underlying that, parent participation in curriculum. Let's look beyond the memorybank movie of the garden coming into being to attend to parents' positioning in relation to this project and in relation to curriculum in general.

Earlier I said that my story, like Burnett's The Secret Garden, is a story of kingdoms, mystery, magic, relationships and trust. In looking beyond the images, I am attempting to attend more deeply and more fully to these elements, to view them through a lens that sees small and through a lens that sees big.

Kingdoms

When we see curriculum through a lens that sees small, through the lens of a system and from a detached and technical point of view, we see a mandated set of documents which defines what all teachers are required to teach. As an integral area of responsibility, curriculum knowledge is an important aspect of educators' professional knowledge.

> However you define a professional, that person's training makes clear that there are boundaries of responsibility into which "outsiders" should not be permitted to intrude. Those *boundaries* are intended to define and protect the power, authority, and decision making derived from formal training and experience. (Sarason, 1995, p. 23)

Those boundaries define the teacher's kingdom. Those boundaries surround a 'secret garden'—"a world all [the teacher's] own" (Burnett, 1911, p. 95). Those boundaries keep "outsiders"—parents—from participating in curriculum.

Viewing curriculum through a lens that sees small, both educators and parents within this study acknowledged, and sometimes supported or defended, the situating of curriculum in the professional territory off limits to "outsiders." Evelyn, in her conversation with Katherine about parents' support of curriculum, admitted, "Some teachers still feel they're the masters of their own kingdoms, shut the door, boom" (taped conversation, February 3, 1999). In another conversation, Evelyn's principal colleague Jenny commented too on witnessing this creation of a separate space by teachers in schools. "We're careful; we keep our distance. We'll interact with you but we won't invite you in. Because we know there's danger. So we throw up invisible walls" (taped conversation, March 25, 1999).

Kris, positioned as a parent on the school landscape, also sees—and respects—the boundaries surrounding the professional territory of teachers. When Katherine raised the question at the school council meeting of why there wasn't a section within the volunteer organization system for curriculum support, Kris, chair of the school council and member of the committee who developed the new volunteer system, responded by saying, "We don't want to step on teachers' toes. We can do the things on this volunteer list without infringing" (field notes, January 19, 1999). Later, she talked about her beliefs regarding parent participation in curriculum and affirmed, "I respect everyone's profession. I'm not here to tell the teachers how to do their job or to get involved in curriculum—that's their area" (taped conversation, September 1, 1999). Through a lens that sees small, a lens with a technical point of focus, Kris accepted her positioning as "outsider."

Rachel, the parent coordinator of the hot lunch program, acknowledges and honors the professional boundaries surrounding curriculum. Reflecting on her experience reading with young children in the classroom, she commented, "I strongly believe in using parents for things that don't need professional skill. Like the reading business, I really enjoyed the time with the kids doing that but I didn't feel it was the best place for me to be. Are the teacher's skills being used in the best way? Shouldn't the teacher be reading with the children? And I guess that's my bottom line. Is the teacher's professionalism not being diminished by something that the parent does come in and do" (taped conversation, August 31,1999)? Rachel too, through a lens that sees small, focussed on "[t]hose boundaries…intended to define and protect the power, authority, and decision making derived from formal training and experience."

I believe this overwhelming acknowledgement of the boundaries surrounding the professional territory of curriculum and instruction caused Evelyn to see the secret garden as a place of promise. Remember Evelyn's comment about how the garden project may be a less intrusive way for parents to participate in curriculum? I believe Evelyn saw the garden as "a neutral place—a place where the magic of bringing people together with soil and with plants just allows people to let down their guard, to be among a safe environment" (taped conversation, March 25, 1999). The garden was seen to be a place free from the invisible walls surrounding the classroom, the professional territory of the teacher, the place of curriculum expertise.

But was it? Were parents able to **participate** in the garden project? Or was it another place of parent involvement?

Switching to a lens that sees big, I focus my gaze on Heather and Katherine. They are parents who, like Kris and Rachel, understand "[teachers'] training makes clear that there are *boundaries* of responsibility into which 'outsiders' should not be permitted to intrude." Also like Kris and Rachel, they respect teachers' training and professional knowledge. What they do not accept is that teacher knowledge excludes a place for their own skills and knowledge.

Katherine

At the time Katherine questioned why the volunteer organization system only listed opportunities for parents to provide clerical support to teachers and not curriculum support, she stated, "I don't want to do any of these jobs. But I do want to share my strengths" (field notes, January 19, 1999). In her follow-up conversation with Evelyn, she elaborated. "When I saw the list, I was really glad they initiated it…; it provides a great resource of parents—but parents who can do more than photocopy, even though I understand the need." She told Evelyn about the rocks and minerals kits she borrowed from a source in Calgary for her daughter's teacher to use in his science program and she spoke about small group activities she has done with children during Agriculture Week and Environment Week. She reflected, "It's empowerment. It's something in which I can grow myself or benefit. It's sharing myself" (taped conversation, February 3, 1999).

Knowing the secret garden project would enable Katherine to share her strengths, Evelyn invited her to participate. As I mentioned earlier, Katherine became a key member of the secret garden team, garnering donations of materials, services and funds, and organizing and directing the site preparation. She played the role of project manager, taking responsibility for coordinating deliveries of top soil, manure and compost and for scheduling the bobcat. Volunteers often turned to Katherine for direction during the workbees. It appears she "ha[d] a part in" — a significant part in — the development of the secret garden.

Continuing to see big, I asked Katherine to share with me the details and particularities of the part she played as a parent member of the secret garden team. I wondered how she perceived her positioning and the use of her expertise.

> [The secret garden project] was sort of an open brainstorming and then [Evelyn] said, "Let's just get going." It was an opening to allow me to be welcomed in here, to say okay, I can supply some skills. I didn't know exactly what my duties or responsibilities or ownership were so I thought, well, let's just see what happens. I didn't know if I was going to be the leader or the guider or the coordinator or supporter in this. So I thought I'll just wait until some pieces come together. And it just came together so nicely because all of a sudden all these other partners came in. Then after we did a master plan Evelyn said, "Well, why don't we just do it?" That was like an opening to say I had permission to just go do it and I said I promise I'll keep the costs low.
>
> There were different layers of support. We had the administrative support from Evelyn. We had the business support. The teachers got into this and then the parents all of a sudden just showed up out of the woodwork.... It was quite interesting because I think it built momentum. Because I'm good at coordinating and bringing things together, new project initiation, but I don't like following through for the next five years.... But it was enough — the foundation was developed so now over the next five years or ten years, they can develop curriculum with it. (taped conversation, September 1, 1999)

The secret garden project provided a place for Katherine to merge her skills and knowledge with the skills and knowledge of educators, parents and business partners.

She was able to do the work she liked and saw herself as being skilled at—new project initiation, facilitation, coordination—with support and the flexibility "to just go do it." She was able to help build the foundation for the secret garden, a place to facilitate learning about environmental stewardship and sustainability "from a health aspect, from a spirituality aspect, from a science aspect, from a social studies aspect" (taped conversation, September 1, 1999). She was able to create a place she believes is really important for children and for their long term future. When Katherine first talked about parent support of curriculum with Evelyn, she said, "It's empowerment." It is empowerment in the eyes of Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez and Bloom (1993) as well. The secret garden project, for Katherine, was one in which "the roles of teacher and parent [were] equal and complementary, sharing the same purpose and characterized by mutual respect, information sharing and decision making" (p. 94).

Katherine valued the opportunities the secret garden project gave her to share her knowledge and skills. She reflected:

> Boundaries I guess are good just as long as there's windows and doors that you can walk in and out of. In some schools, it's just that the administrator's vision is quite narrow and it's brick walls. You can't get very far as a parent. But this was like windows and doors and skylights. (taped conversation, September 1, 1999)

Heather

Just as Katherine became engaged in the secret garden project because of an invitation from Evelyn, so did Heather. Seeing big the details and particularities of Heather's experience, we get a different story of parent participation in the secret garden.

> At the school [Heather's] children attended prior to Gardenview, there was really not a high level of parent participation, other than advocacy for certain things or the snipping shapes kind of thing. There was nothing [she] could really feel passionate about or get really involved in or felt really welcomed into (taped conversation, August 31, 1999).

Then Heather chose to move her two children mid-year because one of her daughters was having a difficult experience. While a number of other schools would not accept the girls at that time, Evelyn "was so welcoming." She accepted Heather's daughters and they "blossomed" at Gardenview.

When Evelyn showed Heather the secret garden and told her how much they would love to have her participate in the project, Heather agreed for two reasons.

> I was delighted. I thought, 'I'd be happy to participate.' Because, in a sense I guess, I owe[d] Evelyn a bit of a debt and for me it was a show of my gratitude. And because, out of anything there would ever be to do in a school, that would be the thing. It just meshed precisely at the time. In order to teach the course I was teaching at the university, I was just buried in all the literature on sustainability, how to teach sustainability to all ages, what ecological literacy is and all that kind of thing. So I was fully immersed in that and part of that is pulling together a naturalized area as a teaching place. And as a place for natural systems to be fully functional so kids can become re-embedded into their natural world which they are so profoundly alienated from at the moment.... So I saw the tremendous potential and I was quite fired up. (taped conversation, August 31, 1999)

With her focus on sustainability, Heather put energy into gathering information and reflecting on processes which would build student, parent, staff and community ownership of the garden. After attending a workshop in the spring on how to put together an outdoor classroom, Heather met with Evelyn to share the information and typed out steps for a participatory process (taped conversation, August 31, 1999). As I mentioned earlier, it was Heather who facilitated the brainstorming with the staff team, then wrote the successful funding proposal delineating the goals, outcomes and impact of the project, and shared the proposal with parents at the school council meeting. Also, Heather researched natural species and purchased trees, shrubs and perennials which she planted in the naturalized area of the secret garden (taped conversation, August 31, 1999). It appears, using her professional knowledge and expertise, Heather "ha[d] a part in" — a significant part in — the development of the secret garden.

Continuing to see big, I asked Heather to share with me the details and particularities of the part she played as a parent member of the secret garden team. I wondered how she perceived her positioning and the use of her expertise.

> My key words were sustainability — that absolutely had to be the key concept behind anything that we did — and second is participation, democratic participation. So that everybody — parents, students, teachers and the larger community — are all in it from the beginning. So there is complete ownership. And what happened is that the process that unfolded last year violated all those principles. And it was so incredibly difficult to stand by. I tried to gently prod. I tried to gently suggest things. I kept trying to tactfully input into the process to redirect it. I believe in democracy and participation and honoring people's gifts and learning as we go. It just violated all those principles.
>
> ...So I've been thinking what did happen here and how do I understand what's happened here? What can I learn from this? And in terms of parental involvement, what's to be learned here? How do you involve people in an action, whether a social environmental action, in a nonalienating way? ...I think the driving force was that [the secret garden team] really needed to see something tangible — and I totally understand that. It's just the tangible came before the shared vision and the necessary preparatory education with students and the community about what the concept is and before their commitment to the overall concept. I was really pleased on one hand that so much happened — there was tangible evidence, we got the money we applied for — so there were a lot of really good things about it. I just feel we've done the process backwards.
>
> But what has happened is that people have learned as they've gone through the process. There were mistakes made but now we'll learn our way

out of this. (taped conversation, August 31, 1999)

The secret garden project provided an opportunity for Heather to share her skills and knowledge with educators, parents, and business partners. While her expertise was honored in the initial brainstorming and through the grant writing process, Heather felt her knowing was not considered as the process for developing the garden unfolded. Although there were some rewards from the project, the experience was difficult and frustrating for Heather in many ways. Attending to her reflections, I wonder—was Heather involved in the secret garden—"included as part of the life of the school because it [was] convenient or useful to have [her] there" (Benson, 1999, p. 48)? Was Heather a participant in the secret garden—"so much a part of the action that it [was] impossible to exclude [her]" (Beare, in Benson, 1999, p. 48)?

In typical parent involvement activities, parents do tasks such as laminate and photocopy, even read with children or help with small group activities. All of these are tasks that are useful or convenient to the teacher to have someone else do or assist with. All of these are tasks which the teacher decides are important. All of these are tasks which do not require specialized knowledge or skill and which any parent volunteer could do. The knowledge Heather brought to the secret garden project was specialized knowledge. There was no other parent at Gardenview who could bring to the project what Heather brought. Previous grant proposals for the environmental classroom had been unsuccessful, yet Heather's proposal met with success. Heather was immersed in the literature on sustainability and natural systems and had both knowledge and passion to share regarding the naturalized area of the secret garden. Heather had experience teaching adults how to live sustainably both from an ecological and a personal point of view (taped conversation, August 31, 1999). I believe Heather was so much a part of the action of the secret garden that it would have been impossible to exclude her. I believe Heather was a participant.

Yet, is participation that black and white? Are you either a participant or not a participant? Is participation more complex and multifaceted than that? From Katherine's earlier comments, we can see that she was positioned in Gardenview's secret garden in much the same way Dickon and Mary were positioned in their secret garden. Like Dickon and Mary, Katherine saw herself as playing a leadership role, a facilitative role. Katherine saw herself as having the autonomy to make decisions, purchase supplies and services, and coordinate volunteer efforts.

Heather, on the other hand, saw herself positioned more like the gardener than like Mary or Dickon.

> Using the secret garden story, I considered myself closest to the gardener, who worked in the background finding resources, telling stories of other gardens, sharing the history of why this one had grown over, and offering my gardening knowledge to help make the dream a reality. … My goal was seeing the majority of the staff and students of the school as Colin—attracted to the garden while working side by side with friends and with the learning leadership of the key group (Mary and Dickon). (personal correspondence, November 26, 2000)

In reflecting on why she felt positioned like the gardener rather than like Dickon or Mary, Heather realized, "The one vital piece of knowledge I came [to the secret garden project] with was the one that was not used" (personal correspondence, November 26, 2000). While Heather was able to share professional content knowledge, she was unable to share her expertise in "designing a process for broad participation and community learning." She was unable to facilitate the development of a democratic learning community in which participants learned from each other along the way as they worked toward creating an outdoor classroom. She was unable to share the one gift she hoped to give.

Katherine and Heather were both parent participants in the secret garden project, and yet they were participants in very different ways. Their contrasting experiences help us to see how complex parent participation is and how much we have to learn about creating places for parents within the kingdom of curriculum. How do we honor diverse ways of knowing as we begin to learn together? How do we transform the kingdom into a democratic learning community?

In reflecting on the composition of the secret garden team we see how incredibly diverse it was. Matt and Samantha, teacher members of the team, had knowledge of curriculum and processes to engage children in teaching and learning activities. Katherine, as a soil scientist, had knowledge of soils and project management. The landscape architect had knowledge of form, shape and size. Heather, a PhD candidate in global education, had knowledge of sustainability, ecological literacy and naturalization. As Heather reflected on her experience as a member of this diverse team, I asked her, "How do we create spaces for teachers and parents in schools that are rewarding and mutually educational and mutually respectful?" She responded,

> It's like having a garden and the naturalized environment live side by side. That's almost a metaphor for it. What needs to happen is there needs to be a blending. But not from an expert model. It's a sharing. Perhaps some of that comes from experience. Perhaps some of it comes from confidence. Perhaps some of it comes from understanding and a willingness and an openness to learn from others that is open to prodding yet not to feeling threatened.
> (taped conversation, August 31, 1999)

Heather's thoughts cause me to wonder about kingdoms and professional boundaries…. When confronted with complexity and messiness, will teachers reclaim their curriculum space and rebuild the walls around their 'secret garden', choosing only to involve parents when it is convenient and useful? Or, when confronted with complexity and messiness, will everyone "learn [their] way out of [it]" with parents maintaining their rightful place in 'the secret garden'?

Mystery and Magic

Do teachers' professional boundaries make a mystery of the curriculum enclosed within them? Does relaxing those boundaries, or putting "windows and doors and skylights" in them, replace the mystery of curriculum for parents with the magic of participation? What do we see when we see small? What do we see when we see big?

Looking at Gardenview through the window of an airplane, I see a parent night where all parents are invited to the school and where the Curriculum Handbook for

Parents is distributed at no charge. I see teachers asking parents to complete inventories which detail their skills and interests. I see teachers inviting parents in to classrooms to assist with activities and to work with small groups of children. From this aerial vantage point, through this lens of seeing small, I see curriculum information passing into the hands of parents. I see parents, like Nick and myself, engaged in activities with children without knowing or understanding the curriculum objectives, without having read the background information. While I see communication of curriculum and involvement in curriculum, I don't see the mystery of curriculum being dispelled for parents.

When I look at the Gardenview landscape through a lens that sees big, a lens that focuses on the details and particularities, a lens that "screens [in] the faces and gestures of individuals, of actual living persons" (Greene, 1995, p. 11), I'm brought back to the stories of Heather and Katherine. In our conversation about the secret garden, Heather spoke of "knowledgeable participation"—of having an idea of what an environmental classroom is, of understanding what the secret garden is to be, of helping to shape the vision (taped conversation, August 31, 1999). As part of the initial brainstorming and proposal development, and as integral members of the secret garden team, Heather and Katherine were "knowledgeable participants" in the project. Inside the kingdom, they played an informed part in curriculum. For the two of them, the mystery of curriculum was dispelled.

Both Katherine and Heather see their participation as just the beginning. They see a second phase in the development of the secret garden as being a curricular phase in which parents, students, and teachers embark on a "learning journey" together. Heather reflected, "My goal [is] seeing the majority of the staff, [parents], and students of the school as Colin—attracted to the garden while working side by side with friends and with the learning leadership of the key group (Mary and Dickon)." She sees the learning journey beginning by building a broad base of support and participation into the planning process. As the journey unfolds, she believes there is potential for transforming teachers' and parents' views of teaching and learning, enabling them to see how curricular goals can be achieved in a fundamentally different way, and enabling them to develop an understanding of the significance of the outdoor classroom to children's learning and their own (personal correspondence, November 26, 2000). The challenge to broaden and deepen parent participation in curriculum remains open. What stories will we hear of parents' knowledgeable participation in Gardenview's secret garden in one year? In two? In five?

Katherine told stories of playing a part in curriculum in other ways on the Gardenview landscape as well. She spoke of travelling as a family to see the Frank Slide and Waterton in the summer after her daughter's grade three year, concentrating on things which reinforced the social studies curriculum Melanie was learning. Before their trip, Katherine borrowed a book on the Blood Indians from Melanie's teacher and she read it with her daughter both before and after the trip. At the beginning of the new school year, Katherine sent pictures they took on their trip, and other pictures she had taken on work trips around the province, to Melanie's grade four teacher for the class's upcoming study of Alberta. Interested in Alberta's landscape, Katherine expressed her desire to play a part in that unit of study (taped conversation, September 1, 1999). Wanting to know the curriculum so that she could look for points of entry as a parent, Katherine expressed, "I believe that I should be part of my kid's education—not just from home, I mean in there. I don't want to sit on the side and watch" (taped conversation, September 1, 1999). When the mystery of curriculum is dispelled, Katherine becomes a "knowledgeable participant."

When the mystery of curriculum is dispelled, the possibility of "magic" presents itself—the possibility of "remarkable influence producing surprising results" (The Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1976, p. 655). Evelyn's words demonstrate she sees the possibility of this remarkable influence.

> If you're really looking at in terms of what children need, why would you close your door on a soils scientist or an environmental educator when you're studying something to do with the environment, when you've got an expert right at your fingertips. The opportunity for enrichment is so huge.

> ...And if you're looking at it in terms of what parents need, if they get nothing back, then what's the point? It has to give them the chance to use their skills and expertise, to make a positive contribution,...to strengthen their relationship with their children,...to feel recognized.... We could say it is idealistic but, you know Deb, I don't think it is. I think it's just a conversation that's not taking place. I think we're just not taking the time for it and that's why it's not happening. (taped conversation, September 27, 1999)

It makes me wonder—

How do doors and windows and skylights get built into the boundaries surrounding curriculum so the conversation can begin?

Who decides?

Do parents have to wait to be invited in?

Who decides?

Relationships, Trust and Invitations

In Burnett's The Secret Garden, Mary gradually formed relationships with Dickon and Colin. Once she knew she could trust them—"for sure"—she invited them into her garden. Gardenview's secret garden story isn't so very different. Once Evelyn was in relationship with Heather and Katherine and trusted the level of knowing each one of them had, she invited them to join the garden project. Relationships and trust then had to be developed among all members of the team. Matt and Samantha, as teachers positioned inside the boundaries of curriculum, had to open the locked gate of the garden to Heather and Katherine, and eventually to all parents. They had to learn to "engage jointly" with parents to envision and create an environmental classroom in which curriculum objectives could be realized. What do we see when we attend to the development of their relationships with, and trust in, parents through a lens that sees small, a lens which focuses in on patterns and regularities? What do we see when we attend to their developing trust and relationships through a lens that sees big, a lens that focuses in on details and particularities?

Looking at developing relationships with parents through a lens that sees small, the lens of a system, it was interesting to learn from Samantha and Matt there was no coursework in their preservice teacher education programs which attended to parents in any way—in working with parent volunteers, in developing relationships with parents, in communicating with parents. Samantha noted the only time a discussion of parents came up in her university program was when she raised it herself in her cohort group after a parent questioned something she was teaching in her practicum. Because the parent went to the cooperating teacher directly and not to Samantha, Samantha "was kind of panicky and so brought it up during the cohort meeting." As a result of having no background education regarding working with parents and not knowing what to expect, Samantha went into her first 'meet the teacher' night "scared out of [her] mind" (taped conversation, May 5, 1999).

In teacher education, the relationships being attended to are those relationships between the teacher and the student, between the teacher and the curriculum, between the student and the curriculum, and between and among students (Sarason, in Shockley, Love & Allen, 1995). Missing totally from preservice education is attention to relationships between parents and curriculum, between teacher and parents, and between parents and children (Shockley, Michalove, & Allen, 1995). In teacher education, parents are positioned in the margins of the school landscape and, as an unknown element "out there," they are feared by teachers. Those fears may arise from teachers' concerns that their expertise does not extend far enough, that there are things they don't know, that they are vulnerable to criticism (taped conversation, August 31, 1999). Distance and fear replace opportunities for relationships and trust.

During their first year as teachers, Matt and Samantha relied on advice from other teachers in developing relationships with parents. They accepted the institutional story of parents being told on the school landscape. They accepted the preoccupation with "management procedures" which screens out "the faces and gestures of individuals, of actual living persons" (Greene, 1995, p. 11).

Samantha: One thing that we've kind of toyed around with was we've had invitations to parents' houses. I've been previously not knowing what to expect and there were other teachers going but then we kind of got pulled aside and told to just watch it. To be careful because

Matt: in a community like this there's a lot of cooperative, sharing of ideas and comments between the community, between all the parents and you have to be really careful how you present things. You have to make sure they are presented in a specific way so there's no way they can be misunderstood. (taped conversation, May 5, 1999)

Inherent in the advice given to Matt and Samantha are assumptions about parents and assumptions about their trustworthiness. With no other conversations or knowing to counter these assumptions, Samantha and Matt accepted them without examination, without reflection. The marginalization of parents in relation to the school landscape is further reinforced. Here again, distance and distrust preempt the formation of trusting relationships.

Switching to a lens that sees big, a lens that screens in "the faces and gestures of individuals, of actual living persons," let's turn our attention to relationship building between Matt and Samantha and Heather and Katherine. In reflecting on their participation as members of the secret garden team, I asked the two teachers to compare their experiences working with a team of teachers to this experience with a parent/teacher team.

Matt: I think it all depends on the experience or the contact you have with those people. Teachers have time together every day. You see each other and you bond and you know how much you can trust. You become comfortable with sharing and you feel more support because you know them better. With a parent/teacher committee, the problem lies in the initial time it takes you to get to know each other. So we could have different things maybe at the beginning to socialize a little bit more, to feel a little more comfortable. That might have helped our meetings progress a little more rapidly and be more productive. It all depends on how you start off and how much time you spend together. Like myself, now that I've worked with [Katherine] and I've worked with [Heather], I feel close to those people now. I can talk to them. It's more personal. It's comfortable. There's a real difference between when we started and now. It's just time and contact with each other.

Samantha: I think I felt comfortable talking with Katherine and Heather most of the time. There were some items at the beginning where Matt and I

> just looked at each other and thought we have no idea what they're talking about. Let's just put our heads down as far as knowledge about gardening goes. But, come the end, we had our opinions and we told them. (taped conversation, September 27, 1999)

Time and contact. Time and contact to develop trusting relationships. Time and contact to become comfortable with your own knowing and the knowing of others. Time and contact to develop an understanding of how those knowings inform and enrich one another.

"At first people refuse to believe that a strange new thing can be done"—a thing like having parents participate in curriculum. Then people like Evelyn, Katherine, Heather, Matt and Samantha "begin to hope it can be done. Then they see it can be done"—at least with time and contact, in relationships of trust, in beginning ways, with beginning numbers of parents.

"[T]hen it is done and all the world wonders why it was not done centuries ago."

Will it ever be done? Will we get to the place where parents will be rightful participants in curriculum and the world will wonder why it wasn't always so?

Returning to The Secret Garden, we see that once Mary discovered the secret garden, she claimed the ground. "She felt as if she had found a world all her own" (Burnett, 1911, p. 95). She invited Dickon in—then Colin, then the gardener, and then others—cautiously, reluctantly, and only after she believed she could trust each one of them. She extended her hospitality. She decided who could "play." And for those invited inside, the mystery of the secret was dispelled by the magic of participation.

But just because she claimed it, was the ground really hers? Who does own the secret garden?

In schools, have educators, like Mary in The Secret Garden, also claimed the ground? Have they, with their professional boundaries and invisible walls, made the school "a world all [their] own," "a secret kingdom" (p. 99)? In claiming the ground, have they decided who's invited inside, who is trusted to play? For those parents invited inside, has the mystery of curriculum been dispelled by the magic of participation?

When we ask, "Will it ever be done? Will we get to the place where parents are rightful participants in curriculum and the world will wonder why it wasn't always so?", maybe we also have to ask,

Just because educators claim it, is the ground really theirs?
Who does own the school?

Off the Gardenview Landscape

Snapshots

> *A father and son stand side by side at a table in the front of an art room. Pieces of precut wood, some assorted tools, and a small pile of screws and hardware are laid out in front of them. The boy is looking up at the wooden box his father is holding. The father is talking and showing the box to the other families clustered around tables throughout the room. Tools and supplies similar to those on the front table can be seen on everyone's tables.*

> *Michelle is holding up a large piece of lined chart paper. Although the top corner has dropped down covering the title, a numbered list, with different points written in different colored ink and in different printing or handwriting can be see running down the page. In the bottom right corner of the paper, a box labelled "Interested? Sign Here" has three names written in it. In front of Michelle, adults are seated at round tables covered with felt pens, pieces of chart paper and coffee cups. On one piece of chart paper the words, "Canadian Links: Ideas" appear in bold letters at the top.*

Memorybank Movie

These photos begin to tell another version of the secret garden story, this time situated off the landscape of Gardenview School. Michelle Maiani, in the second picture, was Cohen's third grade teacher. I first came to know of Michelle at the end of Cohen's grade one year. Her name appeared on the top of a grade two class list posted at the end of June. While wondering aloud about who this new teacher was, I was told by other parents Michelle had taught at our school previously, but had been away for the past two years teaching at an International school in the Phillippines.

I came to know a little more of Michelle during the following year because she taught across the hall from my son's classroom. I saw the enthusiastic and caring ways she interacted with her students. I heard her laugh in response to stories the children greeted her with. I was impressed by the children's artwork and writing displayed outside her classroom. I was warmed by her friendly greeting and smile each time I passed her in the hallway.

During that year, I came to know Michelle best through stories my friend told of her. Lorette storied Michelle as an outstanding teacher. Lorette's son, David, entered grade two as a reluctant reader and writer with a history of unhappy experiences in his grade one year. In Michelle's classroom, David felt valued and successful, he came to be excited about school once again and he learned to read and write. I have this image of Lorette, with tears in her eyes, reflecting on David's grade two year and telling me how Michelle "saved" David.

It was with these stories of Michelle I learned she was to be Cohen's third grade teacher. But just as Michelle was storied for me on the school landscape, so was I storied for her. In a joint presentation at a conference sponsored by the Association for Research on Mothering (ARM) in October, 1999, Michelle shared her stories of me.

> Before I'd even met Debbie I knew of her. In two ways really. First, there was the smiling, bubbly parent I'd see regularly delivering home baked muffins and cookies to her child's class; and then there was the **Parent** teachers referred to with caution. The former principal, consultant, School Council chair, and very involved mom with high standards and a decidedly child-centered philosophy. Her very presence seemed to intimidate. There were lots of stories too, stories of ways in which she had tried to change the general direction of our school by pushing for a school philosophy, by involving parents in class selection, and by challenging those decisions that were autocratically made. When the class lists were decided and Cohen was

> placed with me, more stories came, and I was "warned" in a number of subtle ways of how hard it was to have Debbie Pushor in your class (Maiani, 1999).

In this version of the secret garden story, Michelle is positioned within the boundaries of the secret garden, within the walls of the kingdom. As a professional, she is an insider with a rightful place in the garden. As a caring and capable teacher, she is an insider with a respected place in the garden. In this version of the story, I am positioned outside the boundaries of the secret garden. As a "very involved mom with high standards," I am an outsider perceived to be challenging the walls protecting the kingdom, to be challenging "the power, authority, and decision making derived from formal training and experience" (Sarason, 1995, p. 23). I am an outsider without a rightful place.

It was as storied individuals, as insider and outsider, that Michelle and I came together. Within the first few days of school, Michelle sent a note home to parents inviting us to write to her about our child. We were told we could include whatever information was significant to us—information that would help her know our child better. Because Laurie and I did not attend 'Meet the Teacher' as it fell on Cohen's birthday, I wrote a note back to Michelle asking if she would be interested in going for coffee with me. I explained I could then tell her all about Cohen and she could outline her program for me. Michelle accepted.

It was with a feeling of possibility that I entered into conversation with Michelle over coffee. I was hopeful the unspoken tension which had existed in my relations with Cohen's previous teachers would not be part of my relationship with Michelle. I left for our meeting intending to be cautious and to keep the conversation focussed on Cohen and on Michelle's program. In the awkwardness of new connections, we began to talk about our experiences teaching overseas—hers in the Phillippines, mine in Germany. Sharing these experiences led to a discussion of the current educational situation in our province—funding issues, class sizes, a climate of accountability—and our hopes for other possibilities. As we discussed our beliefs about teaching and learning, and about schooling, we told many stories of our experiences as educators and I began to tell stories of my experiences as a parent. At one point in the conversation Michelle said to me, "This would be a great topic for your dissertation." I admitted to her then that indeed my doctoral research was to be a narrative inquiry into the positioning of parents in relation to school landscapes. As we continued to talk, we explored ways we could work together as teacher and parent, and how our work may inform my research. I said good-bye to Michelle that evening feeling exhilarated by the intensity and the honesty of our conversation and by the possibility of relationship (field notes, September 30, 1998).

The next day, I second guessed everything I had shared with Michelle and all I had said the evening before. I asked myself what caused me to take such risks, to open myself up in that way. I suddenly felt completely vulnerable. I learned later, when we planned our ARM conference presentation, Michelle did too.

> I left excited and charged with new possibilities and the relief of finally finding someone who believed as I did that something was going awry with education. Later that night, I lay in bed feeling worried. I had crossed all kinds of professional boundaries. Yes, she was a teacher also, that did change our relationship, but she was also a parent. I had just opened up my class for her evaluation and participation, and **THAT** was intimidating (Maiani, 1999).

As scary as it was, Michelle and I had begun to create a new "story to live by" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1999) as teacher and parent. Within our conversation, we had torn down the barriers of the secret garden. No longer insider and outsider, we stood together in the garden wondering how to bring other parents in.

We met every week or so after that. Our initial conversation centered around the grade three building unit in science. As we explored ways parents could participate in that unit of curriculum, we talked about integrating it with the social studies unit on the past and converting the loft in Michelle's classroom into a log cabin. Continuing to play with ideas to engage both children and parents, I could sense Michelle was uncomfortable with these plans. When I asked her about her unease, she expressed concern over the amount of time needed for such activities in relation to the level of return for the children. Teaching grade three for the first time, Michelle was conscious of the year-end provincial achievement exams. She was concerned with setting up the activities to ensure parents facilitated the children's efforts rather than doing things for them. She was worried about noise and space, with a larger number of people in the classroom and multiple activities occurring at once. Torn between her excitement at the prospect of working alongside parents in a curriculum endeavor and the panic of managing all the practical realities, Michelle looked at me and asked, "What would you do if you were the teacher in the classroom?" (field notes, November 20, 1998)

I had just read the text of a lecture given by Venetta Goodall at Shortwood Teachers' College in Jamaica. In her address, entitled Parents and Teachers: Co-Educators in the Nineties and into the New Millennium (1997), Ms. Goodall outlined a process she used to engage parents in curriculum. She identified at least one need that was common to all the students in her class, she talked to her students about having their parents participate, she then invited parents to a meeting to discuss their participation. At the parent meeting, Ms. Goodall asked parents to work with her as co-educators to assist the children in the identified area of need. Monthly meetings were established to "discuss the children's general progress and development" (Goodall, 1997, p. 6). With a grade four class she taught, Ms. Goodall established as an area of need for her students "practical experiences for the students in at least the basic subjects—reading, oral and written language and mathematics" (Goodall, 1997, p. 6). At the monthly meetings, parents planned a spring carnival focussing on activities in these areas, made the carnival preparations and talked with Ms. Goodall about the general progress of the class. Sharing this concept of parents as co-educators with Michelle, I said I saw great possibility in outlining for parents the mandated topics in each area of curriculum and inviting parents to consider places and ways they could participate. Michelle, too, saw within this idea potential for engaging parents.

It would directly benefit the children, it would engage parents on levels that

> were largely closed to them in the past, and still it would fulfil my mandate of covering the curriculum. (Maiani, 1999)

Our task was then to figure out what such a "curriculum night" would look like. We first discussed a parent evening complete with coffee, cookies and curriculum. Knowing that such an evening would be much more comfortable for some parents than others, we continued to search for ideas to appeal to a larger number of parents. Knowing that parent attendance at the school was high any time children were involved, we decided to plan a family evening. Knowing that most of Michelle's parent volunteers were mothers and more likely to attend with their children than fathers, we decided to begin the evening with a family project requiring building with tools. After a great deal of talking and thinking aloud, our "Memory Box Night" took shape.

To let parents know about our plans, Michelle sent a note home with all her students.

> **On March 11 please join us for a special family evening! We will be making a Memory Box; a box to hold and collect special treasures and mementos.**
>
> **After the box is constructed, parents please join us in taking a look at what lies ahead in the grade three curriculum. Your input and suggestions are welcome! Coffee and treats will be served.**
>
> **Michelle (note to parents, March 5, 1998)**

Each student also prepared a personal invitation for their family, letting them know what time Memory Box Night was to begin and asking them to gather in the story pit in the library (personal correspondence, undated).

Michelle began the evening by reading the children's book The Memory Box (Bahr, 1992) to all the families gathered. Laurie and Cohen, as you can see from the first photograph I showed you, shared the memory box they made at home as a model and then demonstrated how to build a memory box using the pieces of precut wood and the hardware supplied. Following the demonstration, each family

constructed their own memory box, sharing their tools with one another and exchanging helpful tips. The room was filled with the noise of laughter and conversation—and the sounds of drills and hammers!

When the memory boxes were constructed, older siblings continued to help Michelle's students decorate their boxes while parents moved into the library to begin the second part of the evening. Acknowledging the range of skills and expertise that parents have, Michelle talked about how much she'd like parents to be a part of their children's curriculum experiences. She shared her hope that tonight's conversation could be a beginning to such participation. After reviewing the mandated topics in each area of the grade three curriculum and giving parents a sense of what had already been covered and what was yet to come, Michelle explained how a 'travelling brainstorm' works. Holding up charts, with a topic still to be covered listed at the top of each one, she asked that parents jot down any ideas they had which may pertain to the topic as the sheets 'travelled' from table to table. She encouraged them to note any connections they made to the topic, jotting down ideas for field trips, resources, materials, or activities. She also invited them to sign their names on the sheet if they were interested in planning that specific unit of study with her (field notes, March 11, 1998).

The second photo I shared with you was taken at the end of this process. With a sheet filled with print in her raised hand, Michelle was thanking parents for their contributions and for the wealth of ideas they had generated. She was also letting them know how and when she would be in touch with them to set up the planning process. Again, she spoke of how the evening's session was just a beginning to a conversation she hoped would continue throughout the rest of the year.

Michelle and I were pleased with the level of participation in the Memory Box Night. There were as many dads in attendance as moms, and many sisters and brothers accompanied their family for the evening. The atmosphere was warm and relaxed and the level of interaction was high. Michelle valued the opportunity it gave her to interact with parents and children on an informal level and she felt it did a lot to build classroom community (Maiani, 1999). Twenty three parents participated in the curriculum brainstorm and, of those, eight parents signed their names to the charts, showing interest in continuing to connect with curriculum in some way.

Parents' engagement in curriculum with Michelle varied greatly. Some parents saw ways to connect their resources or expertise to units of instruction within the classroom. These individuals provided a video for the science unit on life cycles, precut and packaged materials to build bug-catchers at a second family evening, demonstrated rock polishing, or gave a Power Point presentation on rocks and minerals in Canada's geographic regions. Other parents participated in planning with Michelle and in the instruction of students. Here parents assumed shared responsibilities such as designing a fieldtrip, planning a lesson, gathering resources, or leading a lesson with the class or with a small group of students. Parents involved in planning and instruction found ways to use their knowledge and expertise to address specific curricular objectives (taped conversation, July 13, 1999).

Looking Beyond the Images

This story too, although it is a different version of the secret garden story, is a story of kingdoms, of mystery and magic, of relationships, trust and invitations. This story too, is a story which begins with people "refus[ing] to believe that a strange new thing can be done," then moves to Michelle and I "begin[ning] to hope it can be done," then ends with a small number of us "see[ing] it can be done." But let's move beyond the photographs of Memory Box Night, and the images of parents engaged with children and curriculum, to attend to the complexities of the shifts we made in the school landscape.

Kingdoms

When we see the landscape of schooling through a lens that sees small, the lens of a system, the walls surrounding the kingdom are featured prominently. Thinking again of the volunteer form I received from my children's school, a standard form I could have received from any one of hundreds of schools, I think about insiders and outsiders. I think about how teachers, with professional knowledge, are positioned inside the walls of the secret garden of curriculum. I think about how parents, with parent knowledge, are positioned outside the walls of the curriculum garden, asked to provide clerical assistance at school or at home, to work in the library or the publishing centre, to supervise in the computer lab, to work with individual students or small groups of children, or to babysit for other parents who are volunteering at the school. Through a lens that focusses on trends and tendencies, we see parents positioned to do the tasks educators deem important, not to be "co-educators" of children.

Following Memory Box Night in which parents were invited to participate in curriculum as co-educators, Michelle sent a note to parents asking for some feedback from them.

> Thank you for participating in the curriculum "brainstorm." I know it was a departure from our usual roles, and a risk, but I think the event created some really exciting possibilities for different ways parents and teachers can become meaningfully engaged in the curriculum. The ideas you offered were excellent, and from that evening three new "committees" were struck to help develop units of study. Those individuals will be contacted later this week to set up planning times. Remember, my door is always open if you have time or ideas that have developed since that evening! Your participation is welcome in any way that is feasible to you.
>
> On that note, I'd love your feedback. I know the event was a "surprise" to some of you, but beyond that do you see this as something that you would like to participate in as a parent? Please take a few minutes to fill out the attached survey and return it with your child this week. Your honesty and reflections would be very much appreciated! (note to parents, April 6, 1999)

In response, one parent indicated on her form she would not like to be involved in more curriculum sessions like this and is not interested in becoming involved in the planning of curriculum. Her comment stated,

> The curriculum session was interesting, however it caught me off guard.... I have the curriculum handbooks for parents provided by the school district. When there is an area that I can offer suggestions, I do. I feel that this is where my expertise ends. I trust you in your teaching abilities and training. I do not feel that I contributed anything of value that evening to the

> curriculum discussion. (parent survey form, undated)

This parent has accepted the typical story of parent involvement. Having lived her positioning as parent on the school landscape as audience, spectator, fund raiser, aide and organizer (McGilp & Michael, 1994), she has come to see and respect the barriers which separate parents and teachers. She is comfortable with them. Through a lens that sees small, screening out the faces and gestures of specific individuals, she focusses on those with training and those without. Through a lens which provides "a vantage point of power or existing ideologies" (Greene, 1995, p. 11), she acknowledges the walls of the kingdom and accepts her position in relation to them.

Other parents responded to the curriculum brainstorm through a lens that sees big, through "the point of view of the participant in the midst of what is happening" (p. 10). These parents indicated they did want to be involved in curriculum sessions like this and were interested in becoming involved in the planning of curriculum. One parent wrote,

> I thought the evening was an excellent opportunity to share curriculum and to discuss parental involvement and participation. (parent survey form, undated)

Seeing big, this parent saw possibility in changing the story of parents' positioning in relation to the landscape of schooling. He saw possibility in removing the walls around the secret garden of curriculum. Interested in co-authoring a new story of parent engagement, he participated in planning with Michelle and in the instruction of students.

Seeing big, through a lens that screens in faces and gestures of individuals, other teachers on the landscape watched Michelle's curriculum night unfold, watched her relationship with me develop, and watched her relationships with other parents develop. As Michelle and I set up for Memory Box Night, carrying things from her classroom to the art room, bringing things in from my van, gathering extension cords, setting tables in the library, there were many teachers who passed by but none who entered into conversation with us or who asked us any questions. Greetings I extended to staff members were sometimes reciprocated and other times not. At one point, I walked into the staffroom to get something and the conversation stopped when I entered. The room remained silent for the few seconds I was there and resumed as I was closing the door. Sharing this experience with Michelle, she admitted the curriculum night was marginalizing her with many of the other teachers. Her colleagues expressed concern that if she planned special evenings and worked with parents in this way, they would be expected to do the same thing (field notes, March 11, 1998). Seeing big, they too saw shifts in parents' positioning occurring. Unlike the parents who responded positively to these shifts and to changing the story of parent participation, the teachers responded with resistance and concern. The teachers did not want the walls around the secret garden of curriculum to come down.

Seeing both possibility and resistance causes me to wonder about kingdoms and professional boundaries. Can the story of kingdoms and boundaries be rewritten by those teachers and parents who "engage jointly" in the secret garden? Will the resisting teachers say to parents, as Colin did to the gardener in The Secret Garden, "We did not want you, but now you will have to be in the secret" (Burnett, 1911, p. 269)? Or will the resisting teachers continue to strengthen the walls so building "doors and windows and skylights" into them becomes too great a task?

Mystery and Magic

When I looked beyond the images of Gardenview's secret garden story, attending to the complexities of the mystery and the magic, I wondered, "Do teachers' professional boundaries make a mystery of the curriculum enclosed within them? Does relaxing those boundaries, or putting 'windows and doors and skylights' in them, replace the mystery of curriculum for parents with the magic of participation?" Thinking hard about those questions once again for this version of the secret garden story, I recall the wordless children's book Three Cats (Brouillard, 1992) mentioned earlier. Remember how, when the story begins, three cats are perched on a branch above a pool in which three fish are swimming? Intrigued by the mystery of the activity in the water below them, the cats lean farther and farther over the branch to watch what the fish are doing. Eventually, all three cats end up toppling off the branch to find themselves straining and struggling to stay afloat in the now turbulent water, amass with fish and cats. I don't think at that moment the cats would describe what they are feeling as 'the magic of participation.'

Using a lens that sees small, a lens of a system that brings us in close proximity with professional boundaries, parent participation in curriculum may be construed to be a cat and fish story—a story of parents positioned as teachers. The parent who commented on her feedback form, "I trust you in your teaching abilities and training. I do not feel that I contributed anything of value…to the curriculum discussion," does not want to be a cat in a fish pond. But is there not a place for parents' knowledge in curriculum as well as teachers' knowledge?

Connelly and Clandinin (1988) help us think about teachers' personal practical knowledge. Personal knowledge is the teacher's knowledge gained from lived experience in all aspects of life—at work, at play, with family and friends, through hobbies and travel, and so on. It has temporal dimensions in that it resides in "the person's past experience, in the person's present mind and body, and in the person's future plans and actions" (p. 25). Practical knowledge is the teacher's knowledge of the classroom gained through experiencing the dynamic interaction of persons, things and processes in the situation or environment of the classroom. It is more than knowledge of theory; it is knowledge arising from the teacher's experience which enables the teacher to make thoughtful, contextualized decisions about practice in a complex, dynamic and multifaceted situation. It too has temporal dimensions.

I think of a young boy I worked with as an educator. Konrad was labelled "behavior disordered." He became defiant and explosive when he became frustrated and could not see options for getting himself out of a situation. He was often physical with other children, and other teachers and staff. With me, he was not. My practical knowledge—my knowing of Konrad, his family background, his past experiences, our shared time together, our relationship, my past interventions, our conversations, his desire to control his anger, my relationship with his mother—enabled me to assist

Konrad in seeing possible solutions. Practical knowledge then, being situational, is also affective, emotional and moral.

Similar research to Connelly and Clandinin's has yet to be done on parent knowledge. Yet, drawing a parallel one can see how parents too have personal practical knowledge. Parents have personal knowledge gained from their vast array of life experiences. Parents have practical knowledge gained from living in a contextualized situation—their home—with persons, things and processes—their children, other family members, possibly a pet, toys, books, games, sports equipment—all interacting in dynamic and complex ways—the juggling of homework, sports activities, meals, laundry, bedtime routines, a family outing, a birthday celebration. Practical parent knowledge is knowledge gained from living with children in complex and ever-changing situations, although it may be informed by knowledge drawn from books on parenting, on stages of development, on childhood illnesses.

Just this past Monday Cohen woke up not feeling well. He didn't have a temperature but he had dark circles under his eyes from a fitful night marked by bouts of coughing. He got ready for school and had a couple of bites of breakfast, but just as he was putting on his coat and shoes, he announced he thought he better stay home. Was Cohen truly sick or was he just tired? He did not have a temperature and was not nauseous. He did have a lingering cough remaining from his cold. Was there something happening at school that Cohen was concerned about? Was Cohen interested in staying home so he could read the new novel he had just begun? Was Cohen needing some extra time and attention from me—time without his brothers present? Only through knowing Cohen from our ten years of living together could I draw on my practical parent knowledge. By reflecting on past times when Cohen asked to stay home from school, and when he has been ill, by considering his present physical condition and his passion for reading, by taking into account the minor surgery scheduled for the end of the week and his need to be well for that, I agreed Cohen should stay home for the day. My personal practical parent knowledge was reflected in my thoughts and feelings and ultimately in my actions.

Beyond personal practical knowledge, there is another kind of parent knowing. That is the craft or professional knowing that parents develop in their careers outside of the home or in their extracurricular endeavors. It is the knowing that comes from being a carpenter, a nurse, and electrician or an accountant. It is the knowing that comes from rock climbing, from painting, from building a collection, from gardening. It is knowing that lays alongside parents' personal practical knowledge.

So thinking about parent knowledge, what do we see when we use a lens that sees big? In what ways did parents use their knowledge to engage with curriculum? One parent, familiar with curricular content after the Memory Box Night, was able to provide a video as a resource to enhance the teacher's delivery of instruction. Other parents, with skills and interests in areas corresponding to topics of study, were able to plan activities for the children—polishing rocks and building bug catchers—which heightened the students' interest level and complemented their curriculum experiences. Instead of being involved in a way deemed important by the teacher, these parents brought their own craft or professional knowledge together with curriculum to enrich experiences for children. Once the mystery of curriculum was removed, they discovered the magic of "knowledgeable participation."

The opportunity to lay their craft or professional knowledge beside Michelle's teacher knowledge became an even greater possibility for those parents who participated in planning with Michelle and in instructing students. One parent's knowledge of the natural resources existing within Canada's different geographical regions, and another parent's knowledge of the link between natural resources and industry and the resulting exchange of goods and services between Canada's geographical regions, complemented Michelle's knowledge of teaching and learning strategies, of the children in her class, of their prior learning, of the complexity and length of instruction appropriate to their level. The knowledge of one member of the planning team enriched the knowledge of the other.

The lessons which were most successful for everyone involved—students, parents and teacher—were the lessons in which each person's expertise was used at the right time and place; when the cats did not inadvertently end up in the fish pond. The parent's Power Point presentation could have been strengthened by being broken into a series of lessons with activities, designed using Michelle's teacher knowledge, to enhance students' opportunities to process and internalize the learning (taped conversation, July 13, 1999). The parent who conducted the lesson on the exchange of goods and services, reflecting on his participation, felt his strength was in gathering the products and providing a more extensive knowing of Canada's natural resources and industries. He felt he should have left designing the lesson to Michelle and that he could have better supported her during instruction rather than being the lead instructor (personal conversation, July 15, 1999).

From all of these parents' experiences, Michelle and I learned parent participation does not have to be a cat and fish story. Seeing each parent's experience big, viewing "things and people" in their "integrity and particularity" (Greene, 1995, p. 10), we saw the mystery of curriculum replaced by the magic of "knowledgeable participation," through parents being afforded an opportunity to lay their knowing alongside that of the teacher.

Do you remember Nick, one of the parents on the rocks and minerals field trip to the Provincial Museum? Do you remember how much craft or professional knowledge he had to share and yet there was no opportunity for him to do so? How do we make sure Nick gets invited to play? How do we shift the ground so Nick can experience the magic of knowledgeable participation?

And what about the parent who said, "I trust you in your teaching abilities and training. I do not feel that I contributed anything of value…to the curriculum discussion."? While Michelle and I created opportunities for parents to lay their craft or professional knowledge alongside her teacher knowledge in these curriculum endeavors, we did not attend to creating spaces for parents' personal practical knowledge. How do we begin to honor parents' personal practical knowledge in classrooms? How do we enable those parents who believe they have nothing to contribute to feel the magic of knowledgeable participation?

Relationships, Trust and Invitations

Michelle and I first came together as storied individuals. I knew her mainly from my friend Lorette's stories of her while she knew me mainly through other teachers' stories of me. When we first met for coffee, we began our conversation tentatively, cautiously. Our relationship developed over time—over many, many conversations, over many times spent in her classroom, over many shared experiences. The trust we have now as close friends and as co-researchers is a trust built through "time and contact."

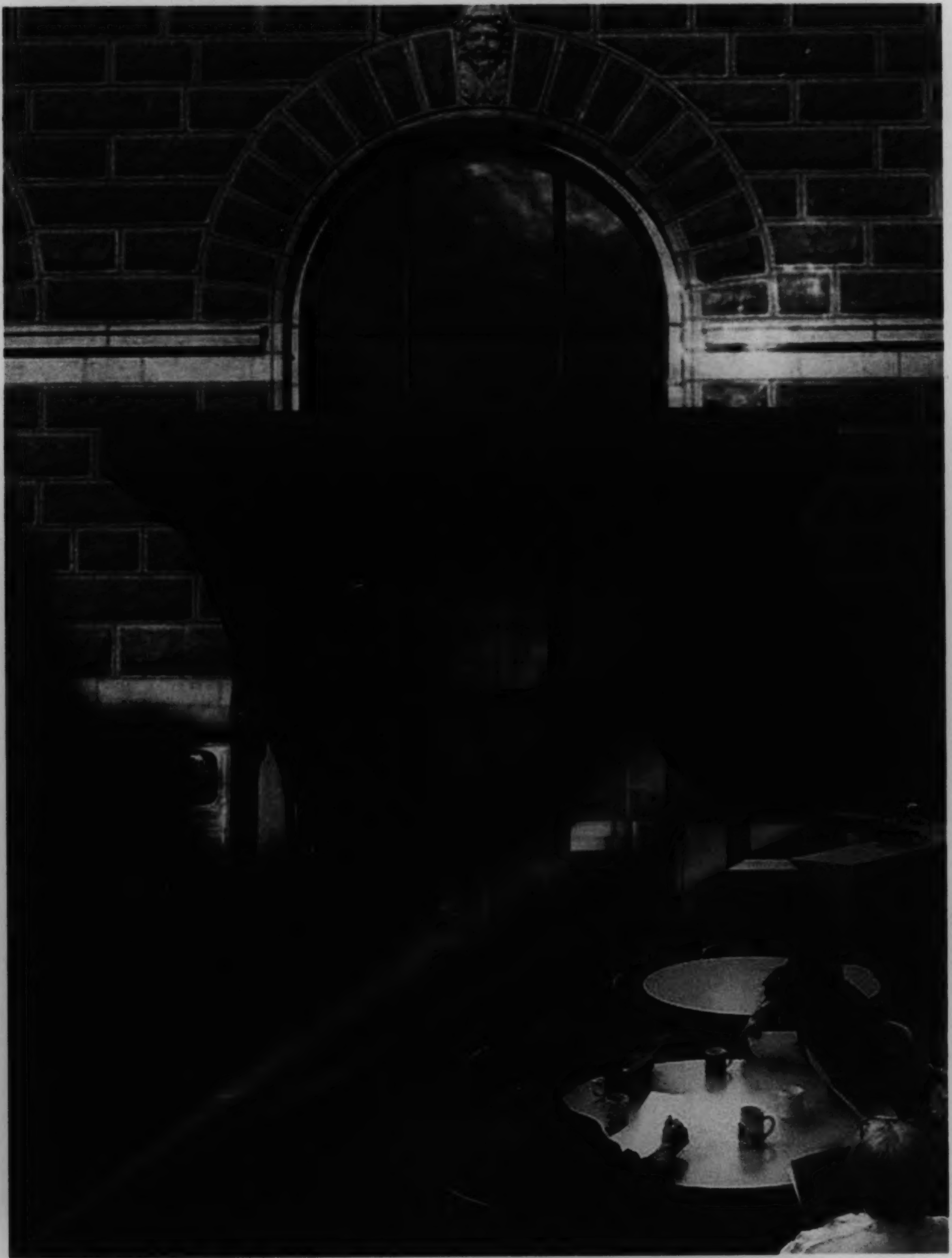
Looking at relationships through a lens that sees small, we see a structure of schooling which affords individuals ten months together. I remember Michelle telling me about the opening of her new school year the September after Cohen was in her classroom. She spoke of how as a teacher there is this unstated expectation that you will immediately love the new children in your classroom and yet you are still emotionally attached to the children to whom you just said goodbye in June. Michelle's words about how "unnatural" the cycle of school is in regard to building relationships—and to ending them—really struck me (field notes, September 12, 1999). While Michelle has extensive time and contact with the children in her classroom, she has much less opportunity to build relationships with their parents. Meeting often for the first time in September, meeting sometimes as individuals storied for one another, meeting with a history of other parent/teacher experiences, it isn't surprising that relationships build slowly and tentatively. It isn't surprising either that teachers, without being in relationship with parents, are reluctant to invite parents into their secret garden. Mary, in The Secret Garden, only invited Dickon and Colin into the garden once she knew she could trust them—"for sure." By the time teachers know they can trust parents—"for sure"—how close to an end is their ten month relationship? Through a lens that sees small, the structure of a system which inhibits opportunities for teachers and parents to come to know and see one another as knowledgeable participants in children's education is foregrounded.

Then why was Michelle able to establish relationships trusting enough to prompt an invitation to parents to engage jointly with her in her secret garden of curriculum? Using a lens to see big, looking at the details and particularities of Michelle's specific situation, we see that she was in her second year with this group of students and parents. Having taught them in grade two, Michelle carried her class of students forward into grade three, with only a handful of class changes. Already being in relationship with parents—knowing and trusting them—was a fundamental part of Michelle's willingness to consider engaging parents in curriculum. Michelle felt had she not been in relationship, it would have been much harder for her to take a risk. She believed she would have felt a need to prove herself and prove her program first before opening the curriculum to parent participation. She also felt parents may have been equally tentative and reluctant to engage with her (field notes, July 6, 2000).

It's Matt's "time and contact" again, isn't it? Time and contact to develop trusting relationships. Time and contact for teachers to become confident about their own knowledge and the knowledge of parents. Time and contact for parents to become confident about their own knowledge and the knowledge of teachers. Time and contact to develop an appreciation for how that knowledge can inform and enrich one another.

How do we remove the walls of the kingdom to enable parents and teachers time and contact with one another? Would parents' knowledge—personal practical and craft or professional—be recognized and valued in a kingdom without walls? Would parents be seen to be rightful participants in curriculum in a kingdom without walls?

To answer these questions, I believe we will need to do thoughtful research about parent knowledge. I believe we will need to continue to attend to questions of ownership and hospitality, to questions of invitations and decisions about who gets to play, and to the question underlying all others, **"Who decides?"**



CHAPTER VIII
RECURRING FRAMES: TENSIONS AND POSSIBILITIES

In exploring the 'bands of color' which separated out of my research experiences, I have had a number of repeating wonders—wonders about what causes us often to see small as educators rather than to see big, about who gets to 'play' in schools, about hospitality, about ownership and "Who decides?" As I reflect on these wonders, attending to schools as protectorates, and as I reflect on these wonders again, imagining a non-protectorate school structure, I return to snapshots previously shared and to the memorybank movies which surround them. These recurring frames capture images which live inside me, always vivid, sometimes frozen in a significant moment, other times moving with the momentum of emotion and interaction. These recurring frames evoke stories of my lived experiences and the lived experiences of parents and educators on the Gardenview landscape. These recurring frames continue to inform my thinking and the construction and expression of my knowing.

Awakening to a Metaphor of Colonialism

Last April, I attended the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) in Baton Rouge. Reviewing the program, I noted the establishment of a Special Interest Group (SIG) on Family, School, Community Partnerships and an increase in the number of sessions that had parents as the topic. I was encouraged by this greater attention being paid to the positioning of parents in relation to schools.

In a session entitled Models of Teacher Education for Enhancing Parental Involvement in Education, sponsored by Division K, Teaching and Teacher Education, Deanna Evans-Shilling (2000) spoke about the Parent Power Project, running for fifteen years, which provides support for families of children who are failing in school. The program teaches parents how to teach their children. Vivian Gunn Morris (2000) described a new preservice course at the University of Memphis entitled Learning in the Urban Environment, K -3 which focuses on "getting off to a good start with children and families." The major practical activities of the course include conducting parent interviews, developing a parent involvement plan, developing a parent involvement notebook, and planning and implementing a parent workshop. Diana Hiatt-Michael (2000) explained how 1994 legislation in California, requiring all schools to have a parent involvement program, affected teacher education programs in post-secondary institutions. The intent of the legislation was to have content regarding parent involvement infused into existing teacher education courses. Kathleen Jones and Kathleen Hoover-Dempsey (2000) outlined an after school inservice program for enhancing parent involvement, Teachers Involving Parents (TIP). The topics of the six one hour TIP sessions included teachers' experiences of parent involvement, identifying and coping with obstacles, teachers' perceptions of parents, communicating with parents, working with hard-to-reach parents, and culminating with a shift from planning to enacting. None of the presentations questioned the positioning of parents in relation to the landscape of schooling, none of them sought changes to the landscape itself.

The old story of schooling continued to be told throughout all the presentations. It was apparent by the emotion in the video, Final Circle, shared by Evans-Shilling, parents valued the support of the Parent Power Project and saw the project as making a difference to their children's success in schools. Yet the project is another example of a parent education program, "attempt[ing] to alter some aspect of parental knowledge, attitudes, or behaviours, with a view to improving children's cognitive and school performance" (Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez & Bloom, 1993, p. 85). Through this project, the school's mission to enhance student learning is furthered. Through this project, knowledge and skills are transmitted from educators to parents. The agenda remains unidirectional in its intentions and the hierarchy of relations between educators and parents is maintained. Evans-Shilling did not speak of a program component within the Parent Power Project which attended reciprocally to families' agendas. She did not speak of parent knowledge as having a place of importance in the project. She did not speak of parent knowledge at all. While the Parent Power

Project appears to be a 'good' parent education program, it does nothing to move parents from the margins of the school landscape to a more integral positioning on it. It does nothing to change the landscape of schools.

With Gunn Morris's presentation on the new preservice teacher education course, it was encouraging to see parents and families being attended to in a teacher education program. Thinking again of Matt and Samantha, who had no course work in their preservice education programs which attended to parents in any way, I saw Gunn Morris's course as a place of possibility. The major practical activities of the course, though, maintained the old story of school. Through being taught how to conduct parent interviews, develop a parent involvement plan, plan and implement a parent workshop, preservice teachers are being taught that power, control, voice and knowledge reside with them as educators. The existing hierarchy in school is being reinforced. The school's agenda continues to be served. When Gunn Morris shared results of the new course, she said preservice teachers "saw it as their responsibility to reach out to parents" and "saw parents no longer as enemies." Her results did not speak to shifting the positioning of parents in relation to the school landscape. Her results did not speak to changing the landscape of schooling.

Hiatt-Michael's presentation on new California legislation caused me to think of how Alberta, at almost the same time, was instituting legislation regarding school councils. We know from Sue's experiences, and from Benson's research (1999), that legislation by itself is not going to create changes in parents' positioning or in school landscapes. Could legislation, supported by teacher education, create some change? Hiatt-Michael spoke of how little or of how superficially, in many instances, parent involvement became a part of course content. The reform effort, a top down model, with legislation imposed on teacher educators, and a parent involvement curriculum imposed on preservice teachers, is not the answer. Unless we have the hard conversations Evelyn talked about, unless we see the school landscape big as well as small, unless we attend to questions of hospitality and who gets to play, and to questions of ownership and "who decides?", parents will stay positioned in the margins of an unchanging school landscape.

In Jones' and Hoover-Dempsey's presentation on their inservice program for enhancing parental involvement, topics such as identifying and coping with obstacles, teachers' perceptions of parents, and working with hard-to-reach parents cause me to wonder what underlying and unstated assumptions the inservice program is based on. Does the concern Cairnie and Munsie (1992) express about myths held in relation to parent involvement come into play here? Some of the following myths appear to be perpetuated: some parents are not interested in their children's education; middle-class parents are better parents; it is difficult to get parents involved; you only get the parents you do not need to see; parents do not have the expertise needed to facilitate their children's learning. Once again, parents are positioned in the margins of the school landscape, distanced from educators. Once again, educators with the 'right' model or the 'right' strategies are believed to hold the solutions to the parent involvement problem. Neither Jones nor Hoover-Dempsey are questioning the structure of the school landscape or parents' positioning in relation to it.

I left the session frustrated by the perpetuation of the old story of schooling. The focus seemed to be on finding and researching new or better ways of doing the same things in relation to parents and schools. There was no questioning of present power structures and hierarchies. There was no imagining of what a true parent partnership might look like. There was no discussion of parent rights, equality, reciprocity or empowerment (Wolfendale, 1992). Questions which could lead to a shift in parents' positioning in relation to the school landscape, questions which could lead to changes in the landscape itself, were not being asked.

After leaving this session, I was given a folder by a graduate colleague featuring the Journal of Critical Inquiry into Curriculum and Instruction. Flipping through the folder as I waited for a session to begin, I read a piece written by Connelly, Clandinin and Phillion (1999). The authors wrote of reviewer response to Ming Fang He's doctoral work. He, "no longer Chinese, nor Western, but in between" (p. 4) needs to find ways to hear what her critics say while helping her critics to learn from her, they state. "There is a colonialism to North American educational research…no sense of awakening to possibilities, to new ways of thinking, new ways of expression…Ming Fang's reviewer(s) is eager to embrace other cultures, provided they conform" (Connelly, Clandinin & Phillion, 1999, p. 4).

Still troubled by the session on parents I had just attended, I was struck by the image of "colonialism." Scribbling notes throughout the margins of the article as I made connections, I wrote, "Not only is there a colonialism in North American educational research, there is a colonialism in North American schools! Not only does the educational research community "need to respond to scholars with dramatically different backgrounds by learning from them as well as shaping them to [their] standards" (p. 4), but educators need to respond to parents, regardless of background, by learning from them as well as shaping them to their standards.

As I attended further sessions on parents throughout AERA, sessions in which the expert knowledge of educational professionals was valued over parent knowledge, sessions in which schools' agendas continued to be served, sessions in which top down reform efforts were promoted, I continued to be struck by what might be seen as a colonialist structuring of schools.

Intrigued by the metaphor of colonialism, I explored it in more detail when I arrived home. Colonialism, "the control exercised by one society over another" (Fieldhouse, 1981, p. 1), "encourages and thrives upon a sense of inequality between the conquering and the subject peoples" (Aron, 1959, p. 3).

> In the tropical colony the agents of imperial authority were a small group of expatriates who were appointed to fill posts there and who therefore regarded the colony as merely a place of work…and eventually retired to live in their European home country. …[T]he foreign society and its agents who occupied the dependency [were there] to serve their own interests, not that of the subject people. …[They] normally attempted to destroy the culture of a dependency and to replace it by their own. (Fieldhouse, 1981, p. 7)

"European colonists assumed the right of governing and administering African populations, with no other justification for their usurpation than the self-ascribed and (to them) self-evident superiority of their own civilization…" (Aron, 1959, p. 3).

When I thought about a metaphor of colonialism in relation to parents and schools, I saw many connections. Educators are most often non-residents of the community in which they work, coming into a school from places outside the community. Educators assume ownership for the school, and establish policies, procedures, and routines for children and parents – policies about discipline and homework; procedures for reporting student progress and communicating with parents, routines for the entry and exit of individuals from the school building. Educators determine the school program – the philosophy to follow, the texts and materials to use, the groupings of children, the use of physical space. Educators then hold parent and curriculum sessions to orient parents to their way of thinking, to share their knowledge, to teach parents how to support their children both at school and at home.

Playing more with a metaphor of colonialism, I saw more clearly control exercised through the educational system over families. Educators make decisions important to teaching and learning, often with little parent input or participation. As we saw in exploring Gardenview's secret garden project, boundaries surrounding the teachers' kingdom typically keep parents from participating in curriculum. It is only in rare instances parents such as Katherine and Heather find a "window or door or skylight" through which to enter the kingdom. Discussions of "fund-raising, social events, and plumbing" take place outside the walls, as Benson's research (1998, 1999) has shown.

Looking at schooling through this metaphor, it is apparent control exercised through the educational system over families positions parents unequally with educators. Sue's experience of being excluded from the class placement process at her son's school, of reading the words in the school newsletter stating "the best way of ensuring successful learning groups" is by having teachers develop the lists, highlights such inequality. My experience of being asked to wait outside the school until the program aide opened the door to let parents in also highlights the inequality. The hierarchy is established. The system determines that power and authority rest with the educators and that parents become subjects.

Using a metaphor of colonialism, the interests educators could be seen to serve are the school system's. Educators work to realize the system's goal of improved student achievement through the programs they plan, the materials they select, the activities they design. They ask parents to serve the school's agenda through volunteer work, through assistance and support to their children, and through positive parenting. In this structure, educators do not attend reciprocally to parents' interests. As much as I have been asked at the beginning of each school year what parent volunteer tasks I am able to do, I have never been asked what my parent hopes for my sons are that year, how their schooling may serve our family's interests or support or strengthen our family, how my participation in their schooling may serve my interests. I often resent, as I sit with my children after school or in the evening helping them to learn their weekly spelling words, or complete math sheets, or memorize French dictées, lost opportunities to play a family game of Scrabble or Crazy Eights, to read the novel we are engrossed in, or to walk with our dog in the ravine. The school sets the agenda during the day. The school, without regard for family, continues to set the agenda during the evening and on weekends.

Still playing with a metaphor of colonialism, educators' attempts to change the ways of students and families, especially when they perceive a superiority in their way, is brought into focus. As a consultant, I recall teachers at an inner city school expressing frustration with parents for not establishing bedtime routines, including reading to their children before bed. Yet, the community profile in their school plan stated the average family income in the neighborhood was less than $10,000 a year. It said families were struggling with issues of unemployment, poverty, crime, substance abuse and domestic violence. Educators' concern for bedtime stories showed an "arrogant perception" (Lugones, 1987, p. 3), a lack of travelling to the families' worlds where educators could begin to understand the complexities and multiplicities of the families' lives. It is with humility I recall the meeting I requested with Melissa's and Melody's parents to discuss their lack of personal hygiene, only realizing when I met the girls' parents how arrogant and judgmental my request was. It is with humility I recall authoritative advice I gave to parents about homework routines and organizational strategies, only realizing now as a parent how arrogant and judgmental my advice was. In writing about trends in home intervention programs, Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez and Bloom (1993) describe the deficit model, where the school environment is seen as inherently superior to that of the home, and the difference model, where the school environment is seen as different from the home. In both these models, educators attempt to help children learn the schools' ways. It seems that the schools' ways are never brought into question.

Limitations of the Metaphor of Colonialism

Metaphor, in enabling us to comprehend one concept in terms of another, brings into focus certain aspects of a concept while losing sight of other aspects of the concept which are inconsistent with the metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). In contemplating the metaphor of colonialism, I believe it is helpful to our understanding of the relationships between parents and teachers in schools. It provides a clarity of vision regarding issues of power and authority, of control, of rights, equality, reciprocity and empowerment. Yet, at the same time, the metaphor of colonialism has limitations.

For example, using a metaphor of colonialism to see school landscapes more sharply, I see the "badge of difference" (Memmi, 1965, p. 46) which separates educators and parents as being professional knowledge of teaching and learning. While this is helpful, at the same time I cannot ignore the many strong associations colonialism pulls forward in people's minds. Loomba (1998) writes, "…Marxist understanding of class struggle as the motor of history had to be revised because in the colonial context the division between the haves and the have-nots was inflected by race" (p. 22). Marxist understanding identifies class as the badge of difference. Colonial understanding identifies race as the badge of difference. Cesaire saw the badge of difference as culture, inclusive of political, economic and social systems (Loomba, 1998, p. 23). Memmi (1965) identifies economic privilege as the badge of difference between the colonizer and the colonized (p. 10). Spring (1998) speaks of difference in religion, as well as culture. These strongly embedded associations reduce our ability to understand and experience the landscape of schooling using a metaphor of colonialism.

Another limitation with using the metaphor of colonialism is in drawing the parallel between colonizers' intentions to serve their own interests and educators' intentions. While I believe it is the school system's agenda which is being served in schools, rather than families' agendas, I do not believe educators are motivated by an intention to serve their own personal or economic interests. I do believe educators have an intention to serve the interests of children, often contributing their own time, money and resources to do so effectively.

Shifting to a Metaphor of a Protectorate

Recognizing the limitations of a metaphor of colonialism, yet valuing its ability to bring into sharper focus issues underlying the positioning of parents in relation to the landscape of schooling, I began to see a metaphor of a protectorate as more helpful.

> Whenever the colonizer states, in his language, that the colonized is a weakling, he suggests thereby that this deficiency requires protection. From this comes the concept of a protectorate. (Memmi, 1965, pp. 147-148)

Using a metaphor of a protectorate to think about schooling, we see how educators bring their professional knowledge of teaching and learning into a community with the intention of enhancing children's education and enhancing parents' ability to support their children's education. It was positioned as protector that I invited Melissa's and Melody's parents in to see me about their children's personal hygiene. It was positioned as protector that I gave advice to parents about helping their children with homework. It was with the intention of serving the children's interests that I acted as protector.

In using a metaphor of a protectorate, it is important to note that parents and educators are complicit in constructing scripted stories of protector and protected. Not only did I, as protector, request meetings with parents to share my knowledge, parents came to me asking for advice about reading strategies and parenting concerns. Not only did I, as protected, fill out my parent volunteer form each year, I asked how I could best help the teacher each time I entered the classroom to volunteer. Both protector and protected, both educators and parents, perpetuate the taken for grantedness of their positioning within the protectorate. The structure of the school itself imposes conditions for both educators and parents, conditions which constrain them and shape certain stories of schooling.

In preceding chapters, I attempted to bring school ways into question—to attend to them in a way that turns them and turns them again to enable a "deeper noticing" (Bateson, 1994, p. 109) of the school landscape and of how parents are positioned in relation to it. Throughout these chapters I had a number of repeating wonders—wonders about what causes us often to see small as educators rather than see big, about who gets to play in schools, about hospitality, about ownership and "Who decides?" Using the metaphor of a protectorate, I explore these questions to see what insight such attending provides.

Seeing Schools as Protectorates

Seeing Small, Seeing Big

Throughout my exploration of the 'bands of color' which separated out of my research experience, I looked beyond the images in the snapshots and the memorybank movies, consciously using both a lens that sees small and a lens that sees big. By seeing in more than one way, it became apparent how differently we see when we choose one lens over another. Is parent advocacy a change in positioning for parents in relation to the school landscape or is it maintaining the old story of parents serving the school's/the school district's agenda? Through parent involvement activities, are parents assuming a place on the school landscape or are parents included as a part of the life of the school because it is convenient or useful to have them there? It depends on the lens through which you choose to see.

In Chapter III, when I set the telephone use policy of my son's school beside the story of Gardenview's student telephone, I noticed the difference in the way the two school staffs see. At my son's school, they chose to see small, to look at telephone use through the lens of a system—"a vantage point of power or existing ideologies—taking a primarily technical point of view" (Greene, 1995, p. 11). At Gardenview, they chose to see big, to look at telephone use through a lens which brings them in "close contact with details and particularities that cannot be reduced to statistics or even to the measurable" (p. 10). These choices prompted me to wonder, What is it that causes us as educators often to see small rather than to see big? What is it that causes us to see through the lenses of a system rather than a lens that brings us in close contact with details and particularities?

Using a metaphor of a protectorate gives a sense of why a lens that sees small may be chosen as a way of seeing over a lens that sees big. Educators enter a community with expert knowledge of teaching and learning which they possess over that of parents. It is this knowledge that enables educators to act as protectors within a protectorate. "It is in the colonized's own interest that he be excluded from management functions, and that those heavy responsibilities be reserved for the colonizer" (Memmi, 1965, pp. 147-148).

In school terms, the educators' expert knowledge of teaching and learning puts them in a superior position over less-knowing parents. Acting as protectors, staff make "heavy" decisions about such things as class placements, curriculum, and physical environment with little, if any, input from parents. School councils make 'light' decisions about hiring crossing guards, hosting staff appreciation luncheons and supporting sessions for parents. Further, parents are taught by their protectors how to parent more effectively and how to help their children achieve more in school. Protectors see small. They look at schooling through the lenses of a system, from their vantage point of power, through the structure of the protectorate.

It is through a lens that sees small that the professional knowledge of teaching and learning becomes the badge of difference the educator wears, a badge which promotes "artificial dichotomies…: right and wrong answers,…responsible and irresponsible parents, good and bad neighborhoods" (Fine, 1987, p. 165), knowing educators and unknowing parents. The badge "perpetuate[s] an artificial sense of difference between 'self' and 'other' " (Gilman, in Loomba, 1998, p. 60).

To switch from a lens that sees small to a lens that sees big, educators would be brought into "close contact with details and particularities" (Greene, 1995, p. 10), with "contradiction and ambivalence" (Fine, 1987, p. 165). They would have to rethink bedtime stories in light of family hunger and personal safety. They would have to rethink homework assignments in light of family agendas. They would have to rethink class placement practices in light of parent voice and knowledge. They would have to make room for "contradictory consciousness" (Gramsci, in Fine, 1987, p. 165). They would have to "begin to think outside of a framework which sees the 'other' as the problem for which they are the solution" (Lather, in Quinn, 1998, p. 38).

> Should [educators] not be convinced of the excellence of the system which makes them what they are? Henceforth they will defend it aggressively; they will end up believing it to be right. (Memmi, 1965, p. 113)

They will continue to see small.

"You Can't Say You Can't Play"

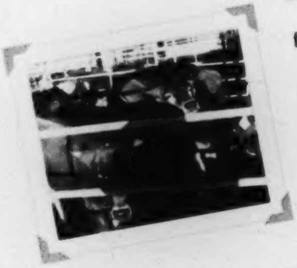
Whether I have been exploring the 'blues' of welcoming families, the 'reds' of parent advocacy, the 'purples' of parent voice and participation in class placement decisions, the 'oranges' of parent involvement or the 'yellows' of parent participation in curriculum, questions of who gets to play have come up with each strand of color.

What would happen if everyone got to play on the school landscape? Would a you can't say you can't play rule, which positioned parents and family members 'in here,' change life on the school landscape? Would it make life less fun? Would such a rule take years to get used to? Is exclusion something we have to learn to deal with?

Are there issues more important than fairness when we consider who gets to play? Do educators decide who can play, and when, and where, and under what conditions? Will an initial invitation to be involved, turn into a right to play, a rightful place to play?

Seeing schools using a protectorate metaphor, I see a "silencing" which limits parents' opportunities to play.

> Silencing constitutes a process of institutionalized policies and practices which obscure...experiential conditions of [families'] daily lives.... Silencing constitutes the process by which contradictory evidence, ideologies, and experiences find themselves buried, camouflaged, and discredited. (Fine, 1987, p. 157)



Remember my story of my first Meet the Staff night as a parent—of how I felt herded in and herded out, marshalled by a ticking clock, with no time for conversation and no offer of a cup of coffee? Practices such as Meet the Staff and parent/teacher conferences enable the "structuring of silence" (Fine, 1993, p. 1) by creating a tightly scheduled agenda, by placing parents in the position of audience, by managing time with a bell or an announcement to move on, and by filling time with educator talk, leaving no time for parent questions. As with Freire's (1983) "culture of silence," parents are "kept 'submerged' in a situation in which critical awareness and response [are] practically impossible" (Shaull, 1983, p. 11). They are not given the opportunity to play—to talk, to wonder aloud about issues, to become engaged, to question.

Silencing of parents happens in many ways, not just by limiting their opportunities to speak or ask questions. In Chapter V, I explored the "open secret" (Munro, 1994) of staff performance in conversations about class placements. When Stella says she doesn't see that parent requests for particular teachers would affect anything too much unless "there was one particular teacher in a grade that nobody wanted," Donna responds by saying the staff at Gardenview are excellent and Evelyn responds by going to get her draft letter to parents about class placements. No one addresses the issue of an unrequested teacher, no one addresses the reasons a teacher may be unrequested. There is an open secret being kept in their conversation. While no one takes the cover off, each one of them recognizes it and knows the others recognize it too. Parents are silenced on the school landscape when they are expected to honor open secrets. They are excluded by educators, or their involvement is limited, in an effort to protect an open secret.

Educators' "fears of naming" (Fine, 1987, p. 159) also silence parents in schools. Naming is "a special kind of talk" which "gives license to critical conversation..." (p. 160). Educators see naming as "dangerous," not naming as "safe" (p. 159). In a conversation with Evelyn about the school's budget, Evelyn's dilemma about naming/not naming becomes apparent.

Evelyn: (In reference to a conversation she had with two parents) I said, "The bottom line is we don't have enough money for education." And I thought, "That's why we have a deficit."

Debbie: At what point do you need to talk to them about a deficit?

Evelyn: Well, I'm not quite sure. Maybe in January or February. I'll see. I'll decide how I'll manage that. I've never really ever talked to them about a deficit.

Debbie: Have parents asked you about it in the past?

Evelyn: No. I'm not totally one hundred per cent comfortable with it. I would prefer not to talk about it and we'll just manage it. I can justify where we're at but it's an uncomfortable thing. ...I figure to educate a child in this school at the level that we're doing it, it's probably costing an additional $200 per child per year, to run this school this way. I could put the deficit out there and say we can do one of two things: we can have parents assist in removing it or we can drop off two teachers in September and we'll be out of it. To solve it, we will have to go with larger class sizes or some multi-age groupings. We're not so far in. I mean, I don't think it's the end of the world.

Debbie: Well no, it's just again giving parents the information so they understand the situation.

Evelyn: But in a way, I don't think parents should have to be responsible for a deficit and so, if that's my position, then I'll manage it. (taped conversation, December, 10, 1998)

Not naming the deficit felt like a safe alternative to Evelyn. Because her deficit was small enough, she had confidence in her ability to manage it. Naming the deficit felt like an unsafe alternative to Evelyn. Never having had a conversation with parents about a deficit in the past, Evelyn was unsure what their response may be. Later in our conversation she said, "Maybe they'll say, 'You've been fiscally irresponsible.' Yet everything I've done, I've done with community support." Fearing naming the deficit and not having the critical conversation about budget excludes parents from decision making. It silences them in regard to their children's schooling. As Dianne Williamson said,

> Budget unpacks everything. Money is the beginning. It opens things up. A conversation about money, and how it will be spent, enables a conversation about all aspects of schooling. It gives parents the opportunity to say how they want their child's life in school to be lived. (telephone conversation, June 14, 2000)

Without information, parents can't play. They can't be part of the conversations, they can't wonder aloud about issues, they can't become engaged in problem-solving or decision-making.

As well as having information withheld, being given information which obscures important issues, preventing these issues from being the focus of critical conversations, silences parents. Fine (1987) calls this "white noise" (p. 162). In Cohen's grade two year, his school principal repeatedly spoke to parents at school council meetings about the importance of low class size in the primary grades. As organizational decisions were being made for the upcoming school year and as the principal was proposing a structure with small primary classes, he gave an article to parents from an educational journal citing research on the benefits of small class size. In Cohen's grade three year, again as organizational decisions were being made for the forthcoming school year, the principal called a meeting of all prospective kindergarten parents to ask for their support in organizing one morning and one afternoon kindergarten class with a projection of over thirty-two students in each. In the meeting, the principal detoured the conversation away from class size, generating "white noise" about the assignment of a program aide to kindergarten, about the opportunity to use a double classroom space, and about this alternative being the preference of the experienced kindergarten teacher. Class size was not problematized, questions were not asked, and parents supported the organization of large kindergarten classes. As protectors, educators determined under what conditions parents could play.

All of these forms of silencing parents—structuring no time or opportunity for parents to share their thoughts or ask questions, maintaining open secrets, not naming issues of importance, and masking issues of importance with white noise—prevent the "critical conversations." They prevent "lived talk" and render impossible "contradictory talk" (Fine, 1987, p. 164). Parents are unable to speak of the "intellectual, social and emotional substance which constitutes [their] lives" (p. 164). They are not given opportunities to speak of their hopes for their child's year at school, to tell stories of their child or family, to share their parent knowledge. Parents are unable to contradict "those who know" (p. 164), to raise complexities, to question policies and practices. They are not given opportunities to speak in contradiction to the school's homework policy and its infringement on family time, to preschoolers' exclusion from the school, to their role as a volunteer on a fieldtrip. They are generally not given opportunities to speak at all.

The structure of the protectorate grants educators control over parents in the school community. Through the many ways parents are silenced, educators remain hierarchically positioned, allowing them to decide who gets to play, and when, and where, and with what information. Along with maintaining control, serving the school system's interests and avoiding contradiction become more important than fairness when who gets to play on school landscapes is considered. Parents can play sometimes, as long as they play silently and agreeably. Siblings? Exclusion may be something they have to learn to deal with. You can't say you can't play is not a way of thinking within the protectorate.

Hospitality

Since noting how Gardenview's staff welcomed families to their school, not just children, I wondered about the act of welcoming. In my home, when I welcome guests, I extend my hospitality. As host, I greet my guests at the door, I hang their coats, I offer them something to eat or drink, I make them comfortable. As guests, they accept my hospitality. They do not challenge my non-smoking policy, they do not criticize my dog's overly friendly greeting, they do not comment on my children's boisterous play. They recognize, as guests in my home, the 'house rules' are mine to set.

In schools, when educators welcome families, are they also extending hospitality? What does hospitality mean in this context? What does it imply? Does it imply inclusion? Does it imply even more than that? Does it imply less than that? Does extending hospitality to families make educators the hosts? If educators are the hosts, do they get to set the rules? Are parents, then, the invited guests? As guests, do parents have to wait to be invited in to schools? Do they have to accept unquestioningly the rules set by the hosts?

In coming into a community, educators position themselves on the ground on which the school is situated, creating a protectorate for the families enrolled in the school. Although parents are members of the community prior to the educators' arrival, educators position parents as newcomers on the school landscape. Attending to schools as protectorates, I see the control exercised by educators over parents playing itself out through a host/guest relationship. Just as I set the 'house rules' in my home, educators in schools establish policies, procedures, and routines for children and parents. They determine the school program. At Meet the Staff night, at parent/teacher conferences, at special events and performances, and to volunteer, parents are invited guests to the school. As guests, parents are positioned unequally with educators.

Positioned as a parent guest, I waited outside the school doors until the program aide let me in to pick up Cohen from kindergarten. I chose a volunteer slot from the teacher's designated times on the chart posted outside Cohen's grade one classroom, just as I would visit a friend at a time of convenience. I said to Cohen's teachers, "What can I do to help?", each time I went in to volunteer, just as I would offer to help with meal preparation as a dinner guest in someone's home. I came and left school events in accordance with the times designated on the invitations I received. I respected the closed doors of the staffroom at recess times and went out onto the playground with Cohen. Throughout my years of being a parent of school-aged children, I have been welcomed into my children's schools to greater and lesser degrees. I have been extended hospitality to greater and lesser degrees. I have felt included in a classroom only once, and that was when Michelle Maiani and I worked as co-researchers inquiring into parent participation in curriculum. As a parent, I have never felt included in a school. I have never stopped feeling like a guest in someone else's home.

As guests of educators, and in the unequal position of being guests, parents are not expected to challenge school policies or practices. They are expected to be appreciative of what is being offered them, and their children. 'Good' guests remain silent when the soup is too salty or the coffee is lukewarm. 'Good' parents remain silent too. As we saw above, time limits, agendas, policies, practices, open secrets, not naming, and white noise all structure and ensure the silencing of parents. In managing the conversation, educators exclude the lived talk of parents and they shut down contradictory talk through the creation of black/white, right/wrong dichotomies and the presentation of single truths (Fine, 1987). No space is made in the conversation for "the undertones…that shimmer under the surface of the words right and wrong" (Kingsolver, 1998). No space is made for critical conversations.

When educators welcome families to schools, as they do at special events, there is a sense of hospitality inherent in the welcoming. Educators play the role of host to their invited parent guests. When educators ask parents to volunteer, some of that hospitality is lost. In a seminar at the University of Alberta entitled Preparing Educators for Successful Programs of School, Family and Community Partnerships, Joyce Epstein (2000) stated the reason for working with families is to enhance children's learning. If children were not the reason for work with families, she said, schools would have the added function of being adult literacy centers. Epstein's words make it clear that in a protectorate, created to attend to children's education, parents are not included for their own sake but to serve the school's agenda. Parents are guests of convenience, providing a needed service or being taught how to better support their children's school program.

Thinking of schools as protectorates serving the interests of children, Epstein did not question why schools could not be both centers of learning for children and centers of learning for parents. She did not imagine possibilities for an adult literacy center—or a skill-training center, or an immigration center, or a book club, or a parent computer lab, or a research group—to be situated alongside children's classrooms. She did not think to ask parents how schools could reciprocally serve parents' agendas. She did not think to ask parents, "What should schools be like?"

The landscape, structured as a protectorate, is structured so control is granted to educators. The structures of the landscape shape how educators and families learn to live in relation with one another. Throughout the welcoming of families, educators remain in a hierarchical positioning which allows them to decide when guests will be invited, to what events and for how long. Along with maintaining control, serving the school system's interests and avoiding contradiction are more important than inclusion when who gets invited onto the school landscape is considered. Parents are guests of necessity, as audience or spectator, expected to honor the protocols of a 'good' guest, or guests of convenience, as aide, organizer or fundraiser, expected to make a contribution during their 'visit.'

Ownership and "Who decides?"

With educators positioned as hosts on the school landscape and parents positioned as invited guests of necessity or convenience, questions of ownership arise.

As hosts, do educators get to be the "boss" (Paley, 1992)? (Who decides?) As bosses, do educators get to establish walls around the kingdom of teaching and learning? (Who decides?) Do educators get to set, and serve, the school's agenda? (Who decides?) As bosses, do educators own the ground? (Who decides?) Just because educators claim it, is the ground really theirs? (Who decides?) Who does own the ground? (Who decides?)

Loomba (1998) writes, "Colonialism, we have seen, reshapes, often violently, physical territories, social terrains as well as human identities" (p. 185). Similarly, although without violence, schooling structured as a protectorate reshapes physical territories, social terrains and human identities. Positioned as protectors on the ground on which the school is situated, educators develop the physical environment of the school to enhance opportunities for teaching and learning. We see this through Gardenview's secret garden project where staff initiated development of an environmental classroom as an alternate place to pursue curriculum objectives. We also see it in Evelyn's response to the parents who, as members of the art display committee, rearranged the atrium. Prior to both these events, Evelyn and I engaged in a general conversation about the school's physical environment.

> I believe so strongly in the environment. Parents sometimes say, "Oh, you decorated." But it's more than decoration to me. That's the first level of what you see, but it goes so far beyond that. ...I've addressed environment at Parent Night. I said, "The school is more than a decorative place. When you look out there at the things in the atrium, see beyond the decoration. It's seeing learning through the eyes of a child." If a parent sees it as decorating, I'm not being down on that parent. It just means that I have to help parents see that this is culture...it's a place for children. It's to capture the imagination of children. (taped conversation, December 10, 1998)

With her knowing of teaching and learning, and her knowing of children, Evelyn positions herself to share her knowledge and to teach parents about physical environment. She claims the physical territory, and she shapes it.

In claiming physical territory, educators contribute to shaping the social terrain of the school landscape as well, creating relationships of inequality. The inequality established between educators and parents can be seen in attending to who has access to the kingdom of curriculum and who does not. It can be seen using a metaphor of a protectorate where educators assume responsibility for the heavy decisions which only professionals, they perceive, have the expert knowledge to make and where parents assume responsibility for the 'light' decisions which fall outside the realm of teaching and learning. It can be seen in the badge of difference educators wear which separates them from parents. It can be seen in the host/guest relationship played out under the guise of hospitality.

The dependent trust (Bateson, 1989) which parents are asked to place in educators, around issues such as class placements, speaks to the social terrain of the school landscape. To be withheld opportunities to be self-supporting as parents in decisions which affect our children is to be denied a position as a genuine partner or a responsible participant. As Teague and Quinn entered grade one this September, I was told by their school principal all grade one classes would be using a "balanced literacy" program in language arts. Without being involved in a discussion of the program prior to it being selected for our children and after a one hour presentation to parents in a large group session, we were expected as parents to endorse the program. In Teague's and Quinn's classroom following the presentation, a parent expressed concern about the newness of the program and the teachers' limited inservicing in relation to it, wondering if our children were going to end up "guinea pigs" to a new educational approach. The teacher quickly responded that she had twenty years of teaching experience. Her response implied her experience countered any reason for parental skepticism and was a basis for commitment to the balanced literacy program. Her response implied an expectation of parents' dependent trust.

Dependent trust, and the many ways in which parent silence are structured are "critical barriers" (Hawkins, in Duckworth, 1986) to the equal positioning of parents and educators on the school landscape. Critical barriers contribute to a social terrain in which power and control rest with educators, allowing them to take ownership of decisions and of conversations about those decisions. Critical barriers force parents into the margins of the school landscape. Educators, living a story of protectors, shape the social terrain.

In the shaping of social terrain, human identities are simultaneously shaped. The parent who responded to Michelle Maiani's request for feedback on the curriculum night wrote, "I trust you in your teaching abilities and training. I do not feel that I contributed anything of value that evening to the curriculum discussion" (parent survey form, undated). On the Gardenview landscape many parents spoke about their positioning in relation to curriculum in much the same way. Kris said, "I'm not here to tell the teachers how to do their job or to be involved in curriculum—that's their area" (taped conversation, September 1, 1999). Rachel commented, "I strongly believe in using parents for things that don't need professional skill. ...Is the teacher's professionalism not being diminished by something that the parent does come in and do" (taped conversation, August 31, 1999)? In speaking about the parent volunteer system, Susan responded, "[T]he teachers went to university and they know what they should be teaching. ...I don't believe [we] should have any say in that as [parents]" (taped conversation, April 8, 1999). The identities of parents have been shaped as "outsiders" (Sarason, 1995, p. 23) on the school landscape, as individuals without a rightful place in the kingdom of curriculum. Their identities have been shaped by the badge of difference the educators wear—educators are persons with expert knowledge of teaching and learning, parents are persons without such knowing.

Before Cohen was placed in Michelle Maiani's class, I was storied for her by other teachers as a "very involved mom with high standards and a decidedly child-centered philosophy" whose "very presence seemed to intimidate" (Maiani, 1999). Having worked as an educator for many years, I did not come easily to the position of outsider on the school landscape. Initially I believed there would be a place for my knowledge in critical conversations about teaching and learning. As I experienced the tension of unspoken resistance to my knowledge, I shifted my involvement to mixing paint, working with individual or small groups of children, attending fieldtrips, and completing the tasks I was asked to do by my child's teacher. I came to assume my shaped identity as a parent volunteer.

In a protectorate, physical territories, social terrains and human identities are reshaped, not through violence but through consent.

> Gramsci argued that the ruling classes achieve domination not by force or coercion alone, but also by creating subjects who 'willingly' submit to being ruled. Ideology is crucial in creating consent, it is the medium through which certain ideas are transmitted and more important, held to be true. Hegemony is achieved not only by direct manipulation or indoctrination, but by playing upon the common sense of people, upon what Raymond Williams calls their 'lived system of meanings and values' (1977: 110). (Loomba, 1998, p. 29)

We live in a society in which prevailing ideology places value on education. Within our system of meanings and values, education is seen to be a determining factor in an individual's success in life. A good education is believed to bring a good job, good pay and, correspondingly, a high standard of living. This ideology is manifest in the provision of universal public education and in the mandated school attendance of children and youth aged six to sixteen.

Parents, wanting the best future possible for their children, willingly submit to being ruled by educators within the school system. They allow their trust to be placed dependently on the professional knowing and decision-making of educators. They are silent in the face of open secrets, not naming, white noise, and tightly structured agendas. They volunteer to do those jobs in schools which enable educators to more effectively serve the agenda of improving student achievement. They play the role of 'good parent,' reading to their children at home, helping with homework, maintaining appropriate bedtimes, and serving nutritious meals. Parents willingly submit to being protected by those positioned as more knowing than themselves.

While rhetoric abounds about schools belonging to the public whose tax dollars have paid for them and about family, school, community partnerships, it is apparent that educators, positioned as protectors, have accepted ownership for schools. Attending to schools using a metaphor of a protectorate, we see that educators are positioned as bosses. We see they are positioned to maintain the walls around the kingdom of teaching and learning. Who decides all this, you ask? The ownership of educators is decided by the structure of the educational system, an educational system which is seen to be central to the success of our society, and to its individual members.

Moving Away From Seeing Schools as Protectorates

To shift parents' positioning on the landscape of schools and, indeed, to change the landscape itself, it is important we imagine new possibilities to replace current structures in schools. While I do not believe top down control exercised by one group over another is what we need to change the school landscape, neither do I believe bottom up activity on the part of parents will bring the changes we need. Freire's "pedagogy of the oppressed" (1983) in which every human being "can gradually perceive his personal and social reality as well as the contradictions in it, become conscious of his own perception of that reality, and deal critically with it" (Shaull, 1983, p. 13) is not the answer. Gramsci's "effectual hegemony that the proletarian party comes to exercise over the whole of society…gradually dissolv[ing] the coercive elements of the State" (Lawner, 1973, p. 49) is not the answer. Both of these possibilities focus on the bottom up efforts of the individual or of groups of individuals. Without also attending to the shaping nature of the professional knowledge landscape (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998a), parents' efforts in these regards may well, as Sue's did, meet with limited success. It also seems important that new possibilities attend to the control granted educators within the current structure, to the badge of difference educators wear which separates them from parents, to the positioning of educators as protectors of children and parents. It is important that new possibilities attend to the silencing in schools by which "contradictory evidence, ideologies, and experiences find themselves buried, camouflaged, and discredited" (Fine, 1987, p. 157), to educators' control of who gets invited onto the school landscape and under what conditions, and to educators' aggressive defence of the excellence of the current system which makes them what they are (Memmi, 1965, p. 113). It is important new possibilities attend to diverse people, things, and events, in their complex interrelatedness (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995).

I believe our most promising possibilities for shifting parents' positioning in relation to the school landscape and for changing the landscape itself rest in the side by side work of parents and educators. As Evelyn said,

> I think if administrators and teachers had the time to talk about [the positioning of parents in relation to the school landscape], and look at it, we would see it differently. I think we're just not taking the time for it and that's why it's not happening. I think it's just a conversation that's not taking place. (taped conversation, September 27, 1999)

"So, to uncover the rootedness of 'modern' knowledge systems in colonial practices is to begin what Raymond Williams called the process of 'unlearning' whereby we begin to question received truths" (Loomba, 1998, p. 66). As protectors, educators are positioned to initiate the process of unlearning, to begin the conversations, to remove the cloak of silence, to hear the voices of the protected. Educators willing to let go of being bosses, to shift from a hierarchical position over parents to a position beside parents, to cross borders previously uncrossed will initiate the unlearning. From my research experiences, I believe parents are seeking opportunities to tell their stories, to make their parent knowledge visible, to voice their family agendas. As I replay my repeating wonders about seeing small and seeing big as educators, about who gets to play in schools, about hospitality and ownership, and ultimately about "Who decides?", I begin to explore new possibilities intended to move us away from seeing the landscape as structured as a protectorate. New possibilities emerge which have the potential of placing educators and parents side by side in reform efforts, and side by side on school landscapes.

Seeing Small, Seeing Big

Attending to schools using a metaphor of protectorate, I explored why educators often tend to see small in schools, seeing through the lenses of a system, assuming "a vantage point of power or existing ideologies" (Greene, 1995, p. 11). Through a lens that sees small, educators are able to use their expert knowing of teaching and learning to position themselves as protectors of children and parents, as individuals capable of making the weighty decisions in the interests of those weaker than themselves. They are able to wear the badge of difference which separates them from the other, which promotes artificial, yet unencumbered, dichotomies between right and wrong answers, good and bad practices, knowing educators and unknowing parents, educators' decisions and parents' decisions.

Through a lens that sees small, it seems a protectorate structure will be perpetuated. Stories of parents and educators become scripted and lived out, accepted as the way it is. We see stories being lived out in relation to the school landscape—educational professionals are the only holders of knowledge, educational decisions rest rightfully in the hands of educators, schools are places for enrolled children not their parents or siblings, parents have voice in schools.

> The universality and taken-for-grantedness of the supremacy of [these stories] gives [them] the quality of a sacred story (Crites, 1971). Crites makes the point that sacred stories are so pervasive they remain mostly unnoticed and when named are hard to define: "These stories seem to be elusive expressions of stories that cannot be fully and directly told, because they live, so to speak, in the arms and legs and bellies of the celebrants. These stories lie too deep in the consciousness of people to be directly told" (p. 294). (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p. 8)

To move away from schools as protectorates, we have to become conscious of, and move away from, living out sacred stories. We have to look at schooling less often through a lens that sees small and attend to it through a lens that sees big. We have to turn to the personal narratives of parents and educators which enable us to "see from the point of view of the participant in the midst of what is happening" (Greene, 1995, p. 10). We have to see learning through the eyes of parents and educators.

In thinking about the conversations in her kindergarten, Paley (1986) writes,

> ...Whenever the discussion touched on fantasy, fairness, or friendship ("the three Fs" I began to call them), participation zoomed upward. If the topic concerned, for example, what to do when all the blocks are used up before you can build something or when your best friend won't let you play in her spaceship, attention would be riveted on this and other related problems: Is it fair that Paul always gets to be Luke Skywalker and Ben has to be the bad guy? And, speaking of bad guys, why should the wolf be allowed to eat up the first two pigs? Can't the three pigs just stay home with their mother?
>
> These were urgent questions, and passion made the children eloquent. They reached to the outer limits of their verbal and mental abilities in order to argue, explain, and persuade. No one moved to end the discussion until Justice and Reason prevailed. (p. 124)

If discussion between educators and parents centered around fantasy (imagining how schools can serve both their own and parents' agendas), fairness (imagining how everyone can 'play' on school landscapes), and friendship (imagining how parents and educators can work side by side), we would move away from the sacred stories of the current structure in which educators and parents now live and cultivate a way of seeing big that brings us "in close contact with details and with particularities" (Greene, 1995, p. 10), with complexity and contradiction, with the multiplicity of different positionings. If the topic of discussion concerned being left to stand outside a classroom or outside the school or being asked to facilitate a group activity on a fieldtrip without any pre-planning, attention would be riveted on this and other related problems: Is it fair that as Cohen's mom (or in Danika's case, Corbin's mom) I am prevented from participating in his transition into school? And, speaking of exclusion, why should I not be involved in the planning of the fieldtrip of which I am going to be a part? Can't we all just sit down together and figure out this fieldtrip?

These urgent parent questions, and the passion behind them, will make parents and educators eloquent as they argue, explain and persuade one another until Justice and Reason prevail. These urgent parent questions will help us to see learning big, through the eyes of parents and educators.

Through conversations of fantasy, fairness, and friendship, educators and parents will have opportunities to express and connect their knowing.

> In the case of "connected knowing," as Belenky and her coauthors discovered,...truth emerges through care, mutuality, and reciprocity. The voice of connected knowing carries with it an intimacy that presumes a sharing of self and other, a felt relation between knower and known. The voice of connected knowing is attuned to creating continuity between the so-called private language of self-reflection and the formal designs of public speech. We can recognize this voice by certain stylistic markers—it includes references to the self; it may include the vocabulary of feeling; it recognizes temporal flux and change; it is a voice in which there are echoes of internal dialogue brought out into the open. (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 54)

It is a voice which is heard big; a voice emanating from a person seen big.

To share one's personal narratives, to speak with intimacy and emotion, to open oneself to the private, to risk being vulnerable require an "ethic of caring" in "direct response to individuals with whom one is in relation" (Noddings, 1986, p. 497) and in direct response to the parent/educator relationship itself. To enter into such conversation requires that all badges of difference are removed, that all voices are heard, that all knowing is honored, and that both parents and educators become world travellers. To enter into such conversation requires a shift in positioning for both parents and educators. The sacred stories of schooling—educational professionals are the only holders of knowledge, educational decisions rest rightfully in the hands of educators, schools are places for enrolled children not their parents and siblings—are co-constructed. They are lived out by educators who wear their expert knowledge as a badge and who exclude parents from participation in decision making. They are lived out by parents who do not question or challenge their marginalization on the school landscape. To enter into intimate conversation in the voice of connected knowing, requires an unlearning of the sacred stories of schooling and an unlearning of parents' and educators' constructed positions within them.

As Evelyn noted, educators are currently not taking time for these kind of conversations—either with each other or with parents. Matt spoke to the need for time to build trust and relationships with parents.

> With a parent/teacher committee, the problem lies in the initial time it takes you to get to know each other. ...It all depends on how you start off and how much time you spend together. Like myself, now that I've worked with [Katherine} and I've worked with [Heather], I feel close to those people now. I can talk to them. It's more personal. It's comfortable. There's a real difference between when we started and now. It's just time and contact with each other. (taped conversation, September 27, 1999)

In the structure of a school as protectorate, tightly scheduled agendas and the structuring of events prevent the kind of contact between parents and educators which Matt is describing. At school council meetings, the principal and one or two staff members meet with parents. At staff meetings, the principal and those staff members review the discussion at the school council meeting. Parents and educators don't actually come together. Distance is structured and contact minimalized through a vehicle intended to give parents a place and a voice on school landscapes. Moving away from the structure of a protectorate, we need to create time, space and places for parents and educators to become engaged with one another in meaningful, ethically caring relationships and in conversations surrounding fantasy, fairness and friendship.

> ...to live among our fellow beings and reach out to them, to interpret life from our situated standpoints, to try—over and over again—to begin...grants a usefulness to the disinterest of seeing things small at the same time that it opens to and validates the passion for seeing things close

> up and large. For this passion is the doorway for imagination; here is the possibility of looking at things as if they could be otherwise. This possibility, for me, is what restructuring might signify. Looking at things large is what might move us on to reform. (Greene, 1995, p. 16)

"You Can't Say You Can't Play"

Attending to schools as protectorates, I explored the silencing of parents by educators through the structuring of agendas and events, keeping of open secrets, fears of naming, and camouflaging of concerns with white noise. We saw in that exploration how silencing prevents the critical conversations, how it prevents parents from contradicting those who know, from raising complexities, and from questioning educators' policies and practices. We saw how silencing is so much a part of the landscape it is taken for granted. We saw how silencing is so much a part of positioning that parents accept it without question and educators use it to tell parents, "You can't play."

In Chapter VII, I examined teachers' personal practical knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 1988) as a way of thinking about parents' knowledge. While research has yet to be done on parent knowledge, one can see how parents too have personal practical knowledge—personal knowledge gained from their vast array of life experiences and practical knowledge gained from living in the context of their home with other family members, things and processes all interacting in dynamic and complex ways. In imagining possibilities for moving away from a school structure as protectorate, a research agenda which attends to parents' personal practical knowledge will be important. Inquiring into ways to acknowledge, honor and position parents' personal practical knowledge alongside teachers' knowledge in schools will be a new and important strand of research.

> The closing pages of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* come to mind. Paul D is remembering his friend trying to describe a woman he knew: "She is a friend of my mind. She gather me. ...The pieces I am, she gather them and give them back to me in all the right order. It's good, you know, when you

> got a woman who is a friend of your mind" (1987, pp. 272-273). …It may be that education can only take place when [educators and parents] can be the friends of one another's minds. (Greene, 1991, pp. x-xi)

It may be that education can only take place when educators and parents can lay their teacher knowledge and their parent knowledge side by side, in the shared endeavor of educating their children and themselves.

While parent knowledge gives parents a rightful place on the school landscape, so does "the political principle." Sarason (1995) writes, "The political principle justifying parental involvement is that when decisions are made affecting you or your possessions, you should have a role, a voice in the process of decision making" (p. 19). Attending to this principle and acknowledging that most of what happens in schools directly affects children or their families, there is not much in schools, in a non-protectorate school structure, in which parents would not have a voice. We would see parents participating in class placement decisions, providing input into homework policies, engaged in conversations about the strengths and weaknesses of balanced literacy programs, and discussing ways to resolve schools' deficits. Parents would be welcomed to the school, not as invited guests but as "co-educators" (Goodall, 1997) with knowledge to bear and a serious interest in the decisions being made.

The political principle "demands discussion" (Sarason, 1995, p. 28). In the kind of critical conversations I talked about earlier, I imagine parents and educators considering what the political principle means for life in schools. I picture conversations which bring into question the walls of the kingdom surrounding curriculum, which dispel the 'mystery' of protected territory, which generate the magic of "agreeable determinedly courageous" (Burnett, 1911, p. 339) thoughts, which build relationships built on trust and respect. The political principle has the potential to inform relationships between educators and parents, not through formal policy or legislated involvement, but through the way individuals choose to live the principle in their side by side interactions (Sarason, 1995, p. 34). The principle speaks to values, to what Evelyn refers to frequently as "moral and ethical decisions," to what Noddings calls an "ethic of caring" (1986, 1992).

Conversations in which the political principle is enacted will be messy. As you "enlarge the range of points of view and of vested interests given expression in the process of educational decision making" (Sarason, 1995, p. 57), you also enlarge the details and particularities, the complexities and the contradictions, and the possibility for conflict. Compared to structured silencing, not naming and white noise, compared to being excluded or positioned as an invited guest, conflict offers possibility. While conflict over power, conflict which identifies winners and losers, is damaging and detrimental (p. 28), conflict which gives voice to marginalized individuals, which brings to light "experiential conditions of [families'] daily lives" (Fine, 1987, p. 157), which enhances the learning of children, parents and teachers is conflict worth working through.

In The Poisonwood Bible, in a chapter in which Leah is reflecting on the Congolese native system of government, Kingsolver (1998) writes,

> The way it seems to work here is that you need one hundred percent. It takes a good while to get there. They talk and make deals and argue until they are pretty much all in agreement on what ought to be done, and then Tata Ndu makes sure it happens that way. (p. 265)

Tata Ndu, the village chief, accustomed to the ways of his people, is critical of the process of voting imposed by the Belgians on the Congo.

> 'White men tell us: Vote, *bantu!* They tell us: You do not all have to agree, *ce n'est pas nécessaire!* If two men vote yes and one says not, the matter is finished. *Á bu* , even a child can see how that will end. It takes three stones in the fire to hold up the pot. Take one away, leave the other two, and what? The pot will spill into the fire.' (Kingsolver, 1998, p. 333)

I think we have much to learn from Tata Ndu's parable, and much to learn from Congolese ways. If we learn to sit down and listen and "to speak to each other until every person [is] satisfied" (p. 333), the political principle will become a sacred story on a changed landscape, a story living in an embodied way in the "arms and legs and bellies of the celebrants" (Crites, in Clandinin & Connelly, 1995).

A difficulty with the structure of school as protectorate, which will have to be reimagined as we move to a principle of you can't say you can't play, is how to make time for the critical conversations. "Time is the tyrannical phenomenon in schooling" (Sarason, 1995, p. 60). Michelle Maiani frequently reminded me of how little time there is in schools to develop relationships with children given the demands of the curriculum and the ever increasing expectations of teachers at school and district levels. She became overwhelmed when she considered adding time to develop relationships with parents to an already overloaded day. I think possibilities, in terms of time, can be found in rethinking what we do and how we currently live in schools. Imagining new ways of doing existing things, imagining doing new things in place of old ones, imagining "the possibility of looking at things as if they could be otherwise...is what restructuring might signify" (Greene, 1995, p. 16).

In imagining the possibility of looking at things as if they could be otherwise, we begin to see parents as knowing instead of unknowing, to see parents as rightful participants instead of invited guests, to see complexity and contradiction as something desirable instead of something to be avoided or silenced. We begin to see decision making as a process of consensus building rather than one of majority rules, to see time as a resource instead of a tyrant. We begin to see that a "you can't say you can't play" rule changes the landscape of schooling, positioning parents in integral ways.

Hospitality

Attending to schools as protectorates, I explored how educators, in coming into a community, are positioned on the ground on which the school is situated and then positioned as protectors of the families enrolled in the school. Without the protectorate's acknowledgement of the families' establishment within the community prior to their own, or the protectorate's acknowledgement of the strengths of the families, educators are positioned as providers of knowledge, supporters of learning, protectors of the educational well-being of the community. Within the school, they are positioned as hosts to invited parent guests.

> '...If some of the branches have been broken off, and you who were only a wild olive shoot have been grafted in, and made to share the richness of the olive's root, you must not look down upon the branches. Remember that you do not support the root; the root supports you.' (Kingsolver, 1998, p. 252)

In The Poisonwood Bible, as Brother Fowles quotes scripture to Brother Price regarding their missionary relationship with their Congolese brethren, he emphasizes his point, " 'Do you get the notion *we* are the branch that's grafted on here, sharing in the richness of these African roots?' " (Kingsolver, 1998, p. 252).

Moving away from schools as protectorates, using a lens that sees big, educators will have the opportunity to see themselves as the wild olive shoot which has been grafted into the tree. They will see themselves as sharing in the richness of the community's roots. Knowing that they do not support the root, but the root supports them, they will be less likely to look down upon the other branches but instead to value their position amongst them. They will be less likely to assume the position of host to invited parent guests but instead to value their positioning alongside them. It is in this side by side positioning that new possibilities arise.

"Communities of practice" give us a way of thinking about this side by side positioning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998).

> The primary focus of this theory is on learning as social participation. Participation here refers not just to local events of engagement in certain activities with certain people, but to a more encompassing process of being active participants in the *practices* of social communities and constructing *identities* in relation to these communities. Participating in a playground clique or in a work team, for instance, is both a kind of action and a form of belonging. Such participation shapes not only what we do, but also who we are and how we interpret what we do. (Wenger, 1998, p. 4)

We saw how, in a protectorate, parents' identities are shaped as outsiders on the school landscape, as individuals without a rightful place in the kingdom. Educators' badge of difference keeps them together in one community of practice, inside the kingdom walls. Parents, not allowed to be active participants in the practices of this social community, are instead participants in the practices of a social community of volunteers. Two communities of practice exist on the school landscape, shaping what parents and teachers do, who they are, and how they interpret what they do. Parent comments such as, "I'm not here to tell the teachers how to do their job or to be involved in curriculum...," and, "I strongly believe in using parents for things that don't need professional skill," speak to the existence of two communities of practice and to the shaping nature of those communities.

Moving to a non-protectorate, how do we begin to merge the two communities of practice into one? How do we position parents and educators side by side in the same community of practice? Provision of access is a beginning.

> To become a full member of a community of practice requires access to a wide range of ongoing activity, old-timers, and other members of the community; and to information, resources, and opportunities for participation. (Lave & Wenger, 1991, pp. 100-101)

Questions such as Katherine's, when she wondered aloud why Gardenview's parent volunteer system focussed solely on clerical tasks, become important questions in creating one composite community of practice. To become full members of a composite community of practice, parents have to be extended roles beyond those of audience, spectator, fundraiser, aide and organizer. They have to be extended roles which exist within the kingdom of curriculum. While Heather and Katherine found doors and windows and skylights through which to enter the 'secret garden,' the walls surrounding the kingdom have to come down to enable all parents access to the garden.

Remember how I was told by my children's principal that all grade one classes would be using a balanced literacy program? Imagine how that scenario could play out differently in a composite community of practice. In a community of practice, considering a change in language arts programming, a presentation on balanced literacy could be made to parents and educators together. A review of the theoretical underpinnings of the program, and resources and strategies utilized in the program could be done jointly. Multiple perspectives could be shared – those of "oldtimers" with years of experience teaching or parenting, those of individuals new to teaching or to having a child in the school system. Decision making could reflect the richness of diversity, the complexity of issues and the many ways of knowing within the community of practice. If, in the end, a decision was made to use a balanced literacy program, professional development opportunities could be extended to both parents and teachers of grade one children. In such a scenario, parent and educator participants in the community of practice would "have access to the resources necessary to learn what they need to learn in order to take actions and make decisions that fully engage their own knowledgeability" (Wenger, 1998, p. 10).

> Shared participation is the stage on which the old and the new, the known and the unknown, the established and the hopeful, act out their differences and discover their commonalities, manifest their fear of one another, and come to terms with their need for one another. Each threatens the fulfilment of the other's destiny, just as it is essential to it. (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 116)

Shared participation accompanies access. Shared participation is an opportunity for unlearning sacred stories of who holds, and who does not hold, knowledge. It is an opportunity for parents and educators to see one another big, to develop a felt relation between knower and known. It is an opportunity to attend to urgent questions of fantasy, fairness, and friendship. It is an opportunity to give those who are affected by a decision a voice in decision making. It is an opportunity for those previously silenced, those taught "to learn *from* talk," "to learn *to* talk" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 109).

Shared participation is an opportunity for learning from one another. In the structure of a protectorate, educators, as holders of knowledge, conduct parent sessions on curriculum, on study skills, on parenting practices. The focus of the sessions is on teaching, on imparting valued knowledge, in a master-apprentice type relationship. In a non-protectorate structure, the focus is on learning rather than on observable teaching. "Learning itself is an improvised practice: A learning curriculum unfolds in opportunities for engagement in practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 95). "In the case of 'connected knowing,'...truth emerges through care, mutuality, and reciprocity" (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 54).

Critical to a composite community of practice is that "participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 98). Is schooling solely about the learning of children or is it about the learning of parents and educators as well? While school agendas are being served, can the agendas of parents and families, and teachers, be mutually and reciprocally served? In a community of practice, my hopes and dreams for my children's schooling become a part of the conversation alongside discussion of the program of studies and curriculum requirements. How my children's programs enhance or conflict with our family's agenda becomes a part of the conversation alongside discussion of homework policies, agenda books, and independent study projects. How I can contribute to my children's education becomes a part of the conversation alongside discussion of tasks which need to be done, school council agendas which have to be set, and money which must be raised. On a grander scale, conversation in a community of practice may be about establishing parent literacy or employment training centers, about adult second language instruction or family access to technology. It is through mutually imagined possibilities, which bring new stories of schooling, that a composite community of practice will emerge.

In imagining the possibility of looking at things as if they could be otherwise, we begin to see educators as the wild olive shoot which has been grafted into the tree, a branch among many branches, sharing in the richness of the community's roots. We begin to see the positioning of parents and educators as side by side rather than hierarchical, to see parents and educators as members of a composite community of practice. We begin to see access provided to all members of this community, to see shared participation, to see silenced individuals learning to talk, and to see learning from one another lead to the development of shared understanding. In a non-protectorate structure of schooling, we begin to see there is no place for hospitality, in the sense of a host/guest relationship. What there is a place for is the welcoming and generosity that come from being "the friends of one another's minds" (Greene, 1991, p. xi).

Ownership and "Who decides?"

Attending to schools as protectorates, I explored how physical territory, social terrain and human identities are reshaped. Educators claim the school's physical territory, using their professional knowledge to create teaching and learning places which serve the school system's agenda of improving student achievement. In claiming physical territory, educators contribute to shaping the social terrain of the school landscape as well, underscoring relationships of inequality in which parents are expected to place dependent trust in educators. With the shaping of social terrain, human identities are simultaneously shaped. Parents come to accept their storied identities as individuals with less-valued knowing, as individuals without a rightful place in the kingdom of curriculum. As a result of such reshaping, the assumption of a boss goes unchallenged. It is apparent that educators are positioned as bosses on the school landscape.

Returning again to my friend Sue's stories of parent voice in class placement decisions, we see the plotline of "Who decides?" being played out. Judi, Sue's son Connor's first principal, invited the executive members of the school council to help her think about a class placement process which honored both parent knowing and teacher knowing of children. After a number of hours of critical conversation, the group created a form which enabled parents to share information about their children which they wanted considered in the class placement process. The next year, with

Darryl as new principal, the form was not sent home to parents and class placements were developed with no parent input. What we see in Sue's stories is how closely tied school practice is to specific individuals. When the principal of the school changes, the practice of class placements changes also. What we see in Sue's stories is how precariously tied the positioning of parents is to those individuals who get to be boss. When the principal changes, parents positioned on the landscape of schooling, in regard to class placements, find themselves once again in the margins of the school landscape.

This same story of changing principals was played out on the Gardenview landscape. In a conversation about the history of parent positioning at Gardenview, teachers Ron, Hope and John spoke of a stronger parent presence within the school with Evelyn as principal than with a previous principal.

John: I found, with [a previous principal], she didn't care for too much parental involvement. In fact, parents weren't even welcomed into the staffroom that much. It was kind of like an off-limits area for them. She was more geared to being teacher and student centered, and not having too much parental involvement. I guess she found it difficult in this community. She found that [parents] had a lot of opinions that didn't quite agree with what she had in mind and so, in order to avoid any major personality clashes, there wasn't much parental involvement in the building of the school or even just involvement throughout the school year.

Debbie: Did parents volunteer in your classes?

John: To a degree, but not so much as now, no. The parent community is a lot more welcome now.

Ron: [The previous principal] was really into writing. I remember the [Gardenview] publishing company where the parents were involved in coiling and doing a lot of the producing of books.

Debbie: Where was your publishing center set up, [Ron]?

Ron: I think the parents just worked right out of the workroom.

Debbie: Why did this principal only stay a year? She took another position then or...?

John: I think there was friction between the parents and her. She was

> somebody who basically had her own views and ideas and she didn't like to be challenged that much. She wasn't somebody who wanted to, I guess, share the decision-making that much. Once the decision was made she liked to stick with it.

> Hope: Over the past few years, particularly since Evelyn's been here…Evelyn has her mottos, like "Children first," and parents like to hear that. They relate to that and it's really critical for them to know that. Yes, our children are first and the school is not only just saying the words but working to promote that and to encourage that and to develop these kids. I really, myself, just love the celebrations and I think Evelyn always makes them so beautiful. They're so symbolic and it continues to create that community. It continues to foster that caring environment. So I think through the years Evelyn has changed things…. The little wall was put up and it's taken that amount of time for it come down but, through celebrations and special events—she always has things happening, we are part of a circle and she has broken down that kind of barrier and created more of an environment that is welcoming to parents and which makes them feel so much a part of the community, part of the school. (taped conversation, May 25, 1999)

What we see in this conversation with John, Hope and Ron is how closely tied school practice is to specific individuals. When the principal of Gardenview School changes, the practice of welcoming families changes also. What we see in this conversation is how precariously tied the positioning of parents is to those individuals who get to be boss. When the principal of Gardenview changes, parents positioned in the margins of the school landscape find themselves being invited to be "part of the circle."

In imagining possibilities for schooling as a non-protectorate, it is important to challenge the assumption of a boss. Lambert (1998) writes,

> As long as improvement is dependent on a single person or a few people or outside directions and forces, it will fail. Schools, and the people in them, have a tendency to depend too much on a strong principal or other authority for direction and guidance. (Lambert, 1998, p. 3)

To create lasting change in the positioning of parents in relation to school landscapes, we must attend not just to individual people but to the complexity of the landscape itself (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998a).

When Evelyn arrived at Gardenview as principal, parent positioning had a storied history. Parents were silenced by being excluded from the physical territory of the staffroom, a place of conversation and relationships. Parents were silenced by being excluded from the social terrain, not afforded opportunities to participate in decision making which affected their children and ultimately their family. Knowing the history of parent positioning at Gardenview, Evelyn chose to interrupt the story. When asked by a parent and later a staff member if parents were going to be allowed in the staffroom, Evelyn responded, "Absolutely!" She explained, "That's how I handled it here because that was somebody else's battle to fight and it wasn't going to be mine" (taped conversation, October 29, 1998).

Speaking about the present school landscape, Hope described how Evelyn uses mottos, symbols, and celebrations to create a sense of shared community and to foster a caring environment at Gardenview. She spoke of how Evelyn brought parents into 'the circle' with children and with educators. Parents presently have a place in the school's staffroom, helping themselves to coffee, engaging in conversation with other parents and with staff. Parents presently have opportunities to express their thoughts to Evelyn about decisions which affect their children. As Stella said,

> I feel that the opportunity is out there and Evelyn's always willing to talk to any of the parents. ...It may not work out the way they want it to but she's always given them the opportunity to discuss the situation with her. (taped conversation, January 3, 2000)

As we saw in the snapshots and memorybank movies in Chapter III, Gardenview extends a welcome, not just to the students enrolled in the school, but to their families as well.

Turning our thoughts to a future Gardenview landscape, what might the positioning of parents be if Evelyn does not stay on as principal? If someone replaces Evelyn, someone who has a view of parents' positioning similar to a previous principal, will parents no longer be welcomed? Will they no longer be able to discuss situations of importance with the principal? Placing all our hope on one individual will not move us away from a school structured as protectorate. Changing the school landscape so the people, ideas, relationships, practices, metaphors and symbols all position parents beside educators in the endeavors of schooling will.

> School leadership needs to be a broad concept that is separated from person, role, and a discrete set of individual behaviors. It needs to be embedded in the school community as a whole. Such a broadening of the concept of leadership suggests shared responsibility for a shared purpose of community. (Lambert, 1998, p. 5)

When we view leadership as embedded in the landscape rather than as the task of one individual, we can begin to problematize the assumption of a boss. In a non-protectorate, when it is no longer the authority of the principal which determines "what counts as knowledge" and "who gets to do what, where, when, and how" (Oyler, 1996, p. 21), we can look beyond position power, or authority, to the power of the composite community of practice. In a community of practice, power rests in access to people, resources, information, and opportunities for participation. Power rests in the side by side relationships of educators and parents. Power rests in what is learned together. Power rests in the shared understanding and sense of purpose which develops within the community of practice.

This concept of leadership is a constructivist concept. As individuals come together with other individuals, and with new ideas, circumstances, information, questions, and dilemmas, they construct knowing by learning from their own experiences and the experiences of others, from listening to others, from their intuition, their emotion, their insights, from what they read, research, write. "Because the constructivists understand that knowledge is always in the making and is always situated, they see the development of ideas as a highly collaborative and open endeavor" (Belenky, Bond & Weinstock, 1997, p. 63).

> Constructivist leadership is reciprocal and happens in community. The role of the leader in this context is to create and sustain the occasion for other people to learn.
>
> Given its reciprocal nature, constructivist leadership is nonhierarchical. Depending on the problem at hand, the [educator or

> parent] leader assumes leadership responsibility based on his or her knowledge or expertise—rather than by assigned role [or lack of it] in the school organization.
>
> Leadership, therefore, is contextual. Each context is different from the next, and the requirements for leadership—who should lead, how leadership should unfold, toward what end the process should be directed—depend on those differences. (Lambert, Collay, Dietz, Kent, Richert, 1997, p. 148)

When we view leadership as embedded in the school landscape rather than as the task of one individual, we see leadership as broad-based. Everyone within the community of practice, educator and parent, is a leader. Because of shared participation in the decisions and practices of the school, and because of a shared understanding of what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities, other leaders on the school landscape continue reform efforts, such as rethinking the class placement process, if or when the principal leaves the school.

Returning to The Poisonwood Bible, we find Leah (Béene) and Anatole contemplating the daily activity of the village.

> "Do you see *that* , Béene? That is Congo. Not minerals and glittering rocks with no hearts, these things that are traded behind our backs. The Congo is us."
>
> "I know."
>
> "Who owns it, do you suppose?"
>
> I did not hazard a guess. (Kingsolver, 1998, p. 231)

When we see the landscape of schools big, we see that it is not things such as a top down policy mandating school councils or invited parent advocacy efforts, these opportunities which are extended parents to be involved, which change the landscape of schools. It is people themselves.

Who owns the schools, do you suppose?

I'd like to hazard a guess. From all I have explored, it is apparent, in our present schools, structured as protectorates, educators own the schools. Yet, I am hopeful. Imagining a non-protectorate school structure, where people see big, where everyone gets to 'play,' where hospitality means being friends to one another's minds, and where shared leadership becomes the story, I believe the school landscape can be owned by parents and educators together.

Reform Moments

> Success is ours to take. In this story there are no villains to blame and no heroes to save us; there are no templates to lay over our schools, no facile formulas to implement Monday morning. What is offered us instead are hard, tough questions about what we do and why we do it. (Abbey, 1997, p. xi)

Throughout this dissertation, I continued to ask certain questions over and over again. What is it that causes us as educators often to see small rather than to see big? What would happen if everyone got to 'play' on the school landscape? What does hospitality mean in schools? Who owns the ground? Who decides? When I reflect on these questions in light of our current schools structured as protectorates, I see how the old story of schooling continues to be perpetuated. When I reflect on the questions in light of a non-protectorate school structure, I see possibilities for shifting the story of schooling, for changing it altogether. Within these possibilities there are no templates, no facile formulas, no heroes to save us. There are no villains to blame. "The Congo is us." We are our own heroes and our own villains at one and the same time. Possibilities for reimagining schooling reside within each one of us.

Anne Barry (1996), co-researcher with Celia Oyler in an inquiry of shared authority, reflects, "When we share authority with our students, we are truly sharing ourselves" (p. 139). I believe the same is true when we share authority with parents.

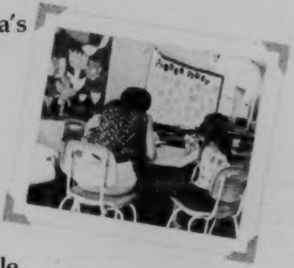
> When you respect the knowledge of [parents] in [schooling], what also comes through is the sharing of ourselves.…I believe if I did not open up the [school] to [parent] initiations, questions, needs, and desires, then I would not have [parents] feeling free and open enough to ask for a hug. It is

> in our openness to friends and to be who we really are that our personal selves can be connected despite the fact that we are so different in so many ways. For me, this is the most important aspect of sharing authority. (p. 139)

In my research study, there were moments, reform moments, where it became possible to shift the course of the story about the positioning of parents in relation to the landscape of schools. These were moments when educators were willing to share themselves, to share the ground, to share their position of authority with parents and family members. These were moments when parents responded to an opening to initiate and question. These were moments when educators and parents were positioned side by side on the school landscape.

Welcoming Families

Let's flip back through the pages of my photo album to look again at some of my first snapshots of Gardenview school. Here is the picture of the student phone. The telephone is situated there as such a natural part of the landscape, barely visible in the movement of children throughout the school day. Here's the snapshot of the dad after having lunch with his daughter. This image replays in my head as my sons carry their lunch boxes through their school entrance doors in the morning or as I look out at the cluster of empty picnic tables in their school's courtyard. This photograph of Danika and Keltie reading with a small group of students at a round table in the open area space outside Laura's classroom brings forth a flood of images—preschoolers playing in the puppet theatres, reading books on the couch in the library, coloring at the staffroom table or playing on the workroom floor while their parents count lunch money. This last snapshot on the page, of Evelyn giving a little child an Easter egg, reminds me of cookies and coffee, of gifts of school pencils, of invitations to linger and visit, of an environment that says, "Make yourself at home."



The welcoming of families at Gardenview School is lived differently than it is in other schools. An ethic of caring is evident in the mottos and signs of greeting hung throughout the school. As you step into the front entrance, the words, "Welcome In, Friends Live Here," signal not a fidelity to an obligatory parent/educator relationship but a fidelity "to individuals with whom one is in relation" (Noddings, 1986, p. 497). As Hope said, the special events and celebrations at Gardenview strengthen the sense of being in community; of parents, children and staff all being part of the same circle. In her presentations to parents, Evelyn celebrates children and shares messages of love, hope, promise, voice and inclusion. Rather than being typical administrator messages of policies and procedures, her messages are messages of care and relationship.

Special events at Gardenview were often followed by coffee and cookies. For an hour after the December, 1998 Christmas concert, parents filled the school atrium and foyer, engaged in conversation with staff and with one another (field notes, December 9, 1998). Throughout Parent Night, 1999, parents could be seen gathered in small clusters in the atrium after Evelyn's presentation and between their visits to classrooms, having a cup of coffee and a cookie (field notes, September 22, 1999). At Gardenview, parents are not rushed in and rushed out, marshalled by a ticking clock and a tight agenda. At Gardenview, there is an invitation to linger, to engage in conversation, to spend time with fellow parents and with educators. Informal, unstructured time is spent with parents—time needed to develop relationships and to build trust between parents and educators.

The sign, "Friends live here," is more than words at Gardenview. Do you remember Terry's reflections on her daughter's grade six farewell? About how it was not only a significant moment in her daughter's growing up but how it was a time of goodbyes for her too?

> I'm leaving everybody here and that really bothers me. I won't be able to come and sit here on the couch and be a part of things, and for four years

> this has been part of my life, not just my daughter's but a part of mine also. (taped conversation, June 28, 1999)

Friendship is one of Paley's three Fs (1986). It is one of the topics of conversation which made her kindergarten children passionate. It is a topic which makes parents passionate as well. I will always remember the shock and emotion which flooded through me when I was told to wait outside the school until the program aide opened the door to let me in to pick up Cohen from kindergarten. I will always remember the tears in Danika's eyes as she told me of being asked to leave Corbin on his first day of school, of being told the first day is for children. Danika and I were not offered opportunities of friendship at our children's schools. "The voice of connected knowing carries with it an intimacy that presumes a sharing of self and other, a felt relation between knower and known" (Witherell & Noddings, 1991 p. 54). It is in the kind of friendship Terry had with staff at Gardenview that sharing and connected knowing can occur.

At Gardenview, it is through a lens that sees big that parents and families are welcomed. It is seeing big that enables staff to value the contact between children and their families during the day, either through a phone call or through having lunch together at school. It is seeing big that enables staff to value the presence of preschoolers as part of the community of learners. It is seeing big that enables Evelyn to honor requests for the placement of shy children in a class with a friend, or the placement of a child new to Canada with the same teacher his older sibling had. It is seeing big that enables Evelyn and the staff to welcome a family who has been excluded from other schools and to attend to the needs of both father and children.

> **To [Gardenview]**
> **(everyone)**
> **I am writing to thank you for all the help, events and patience that you have had with my family. The best riches in life is what is within people. It has been a pleasure to be in the school and continue.**
> **Yours Truly,**
> **[Parent's signature]**
> **(Personal correspondence, undated)**

This note was jotted on a slip of paper by the father on the children's last day of school in June, 1999 and left for Evelyn. With tears in her eyes and voice, Evelyn read the parent's note to staff during their professional time the next day. She asked staff to reflect on the parent's words as they noted what they had done this past year to inspire children, parents, learning and each other (field notes, June 29, 1999). It is seeing big, attending to the details and particularities of the lives of children and parents, that prompts this reflection and the conversation which surrounds it.

In a conversation Evelyn and I were having about bringing the home and the school together, Evelyn reflected,

> So maybe one of the things you have to do is consciously look at what you are already doing that you really think is enhancing that relationship so you don't discredit those little things that are happening. Maybe you need to consciously think about what you are doing to make it a family-oriented school and then say, "Now, is there one or two steps more we could take?" (taped conversation, December 10, 1998)

With trust and friendship established, educators at Gardenview are positioned to make a next step toward shared authority, toward letting go of being bosses, toward shifting from a hierarchical position over parents to a position beside parents, toward crossing borders as yet uncrossed.

Parent Advocacy for Increased Funding for Public Education

Flipping through the pages of Gardenview photographs, we come again to photos of parent advocacy off the Gardenview landscape. You remember Dianne Williamson, don't you? The chair of the PACT group, Parents Advocating for Children and Teachers? As a parent founder of PACT, Dianne initiated a campaign to raise awareness about educational issues and to create opportunities to talk about them. Gathering information from school-based educators, school board members, government representatives, and members of such organizations as the

Alberta Teachers' Association, the Alberta School Boards' Association and the Canadian Association of School Superintendents, PACT is working to "politicize parents" (taped conversation, April 12, 1999). Possessing information on educational issues from class size to financial expenditures, parents are no longer being excluded from discussions on what is right for children in regard to schooling. In Dianne's eyes, the knowledge parents have gives them power and power gives them a place in the conversation.

An important question to ask is, "Is it a rightful place?" While school superintendents saw parents as a large force which they could mobilize to serve the school districts' agenda of lobbying the government for increased funding for public education, Dianne believes they did not anticipate what might happen when parents found their voice. As Dianne insists, "We're not going away," she cites examples of parents who are now asking to participate in decisions regarding their children's schooling, even when they are not being offered.

For Dianne, a conversation about budget opens everything up. In deciding how the school's money will be spent, conversations about such things as educational philosophy, practices, materials, and human resources become a part of the conversation. Through the debate around funding, parents are finding, or making, openings into the walls surrounding the educators' kingdom, and into discussions of topics previously off limits to parents, or in which parents have been granted only superficial involvement. What is hopeful in this story is some parents are beginning to challenge their marginalized positioning on the school landscape. They are beginning to unlearn the sacred stories of schooling—that educational professionals are the holders of knowledge about teaching and learning, that educational decisions rest rightfully in the hands of educators, that schools are places for enrolled children and not their parents and siblings. If Dianne is right and parents are not going away, educators may begin a process of unlearning as well. It is in these moments that reform will be possible.

Parent Participation in Curriculum

Continuing to flip forward through the pages of my photo album, we come once again to snapshots of Michelle Maiani and to pictures of Memory Box Night. As I pause to gaze at the pictures, my thoughts are brought back to the note Michelle sent to parents of her students, inviting us to write to her and tell her things about our child we felt were significant to share. At the beginning of each new school year, I am filled with such emotion as I take my sons to their new classrooms and leave them with a teacher they don't know and who does not know them. Each year, I feel this urge to say, "There's a few things I really want to tell you before I leave." Michelle's invitation to tell stories of my child, to share things I know about him, to express what my hopes and dreams for his year at school were was such a valued invitation

In preparing with Michelle for our co-presentation at the ARM (Association for Research on Mothering) Conference in October, 1999, I had the privilege of reading letters written to Michelle by other parents about their children. I was brought to tears by the love, the humor, the openness in the parents' letters. I was amazed at how much parent knowledge was embedded in the comments. One parent wrote,

> How do I describe my son but to say he's quite a character. He is traditionally a leader but sometimes he enjoys the more passive role of a follower, usually indicating he may be unsure of his environment. He's often too loud and needs to be reminded to turn down the volume. I think he is fairly well-behaved. (Personal correspondence to M. Maiani, September, 1998)

Another parent wrote,

> [My son] is the youngest of four children so therefore he is used to being spoiled and getting his own way. (We are working on this!) He is a very kind boy and he makes friends very easily. But sometimes his friends are more important to him than his school work. So he might have to sit on his

> own and do his work, that way he has less distractions. …[My son] could be a great student if he just learned to concentrate on his school work. I'm sure that will come as he matures. (Personal correspondence to M. Maiani, September, 1998)

As I read the parents' letters I felt their hopes and dreams for their children's year in school, in the way I feel hopes and dreams for my children each year. Images formed of each child situated in a family context and in extra-curricular activities. I imagined the child working in the classroom and playing with friends on the playground. I was touched by the parents' candidness in sharing their children's strengths, areas of vulnerability, and goals yet to be realized. The information in the letters removed the mask of stranger from each child and each parent and put Michelle in relationship with each of them.

I see Michelle's invitation to parents as a reform moment. In extending the invitation, Michelle was acknowledging children come to school in the context of a family and how important that context is to their school experience. She was honoring parents' knowledge of their children and she was learning from what they know. She was connecting with parents in a trusting and personal way and beginning a conversation so often absent from the school landscape. She was shaping a story in which her voice was not be the lone voice of authority regarding her students.

For Michelle and me, her invitation to share my knowledge of Cohen became an opportunity for us to share ourselves with one another. As we worked together as educator and parent volunteer in her classroom, and as we problematized that relationship in our conversations over coffee, we began to imagine new possibilities for parent participation in children's lives at school. Playing off Goodall's conception of co-educators, we planned Memory Box Night, a family evening and an opportunity for parents to play a more meaningful part in curriculum.

I know the risk Michelle felt as she stepped out of her storied position as educator, holder of knowledge about curriculum and rightful decision-maker about programming, and into a side by side position where she was co-constructing instructional plans with parents. Recognizing the taken-for-grantedness of the sacred story, Michelle was concerned parents may say, "You're the professional, just do your job." She was concerned that in changing the story, she may cause parents to feel uncomfortable and to participate out of a sense of obligation to her rather than a real interest in being a participant in curriculum. The curriculum brainstorm and the parent/teacher planning teams was a new story of school and, despite differing degrees of discomfort, it was a moment of possibility.

With the curriculum night and parent participation in planning and teaching, we see possibility in the messiness of parents and educators connecting their knowing and constructing shared leadership and authority in the schooling of children. While there is much to figure out in how that might look and there is much to let go of in regard to sacred stories of schooling, Michelle's willingness to step out of her position within the kingdom gave us a glimpse of reform possibilities.

Shifting the Parade

"The Congo is us." We can continue to live a story of schooling as protectorate or we can stop and ask the question, "Who owns it, do you suppose?" We can problematize the control granted educators over families and the inequality of the parent/educator relationship. We can problematize sacred stories of schooling which privilege educator knowledge and exclude parent knowledge. We can problematize a school agenda which does not attend to mutuality and reciprocity. We can begin to imagine a new story of schooling, a non-protectorate story, and we can look to the stories of Evelyn and the Gardenview staff, to Dianne, and to Michelle for reform possibilities.

In a non-protectorate, parents and educators can be honored by seeing big; by attending to their personal narratives and by seeing learning through their eyes. Parents and educators can be honored by having critical conversations, conversations in which contradictions, complexities and questions are voiced and explored. Parents and educators can be honored in a composite community of practice, a community in which parents and educators are the friends of one another's minds. Parents and educators can be honored when school leadership is viewed broadly, as separated from person, role, and a discrete set of individual behaviors and as embedded in the school landscape.

> Success is ours to take. In this story there are no villains to blame and no heroes to save us; there are no templates to lay over our schools, no facile formulas to implement Monday morning. What is offered us instead are hard, tough questions about what we do and why we do it. (Abbey, 1997, p. xi)

CHAPTER IX
ONE LAST LOOK

An Open Photo Album

As I've written my dissertation, I've imagined the two of us sitting together, having coffee at my kitchen table, my photo album spread out in front of us. As I've flipped backward and forward through the pages of my album, sharing snapshots with you, telling stories the images evoke, playing memorybank movies which surround the images, you have been a "good listener in the special way a story requires" (Coles, 1989, p. 23). I've imagined you saying to me, the way Jean Clandinin does when I share my writing with her, "Say more," or "Hmmmm," or "I wonder...," encouraging me to keep talking, to expand my thinking, to clarify my understanding, to come to my knowing.

As we flipped through my album together, it became even more a story album than a photo album. I recognize that you were only able to hear my stories, or my retelling of the stories of others, that the stories the people in the photographs tell of themselves are not audible. You may not be aware of it, but my research participants were here with us throughout the retellings, as we flipped backward and forward through the pages of my photo album. They continued to live with me as I gazed at the snapshots and as I told stories of my research experience. Each story I chose to tell, or chose not to tell, each word I selected for the retelling, or rejected for the retelling, I did in their imagined presence. With each word of each story, I considered how Evelyn, or Stella, or Donna, as characters in the story, may read my words, how vulnerable I was making Kris, or Danika, or Heather, how my way of seeing a story may align with, or differ from, Patrick's, or Dianne's or Michelle's, how my metaphors of kingdoms and secret gardens may appeal to or surprise Katherine, or Matt, or Samantha. It is not only because of the ethics forms I completed that my co-researchers and research participants have lived with me; it is not only because of a signed commitment to protect their anonymity or to protect them from harm. It is because in the year I spent at Gardenview I have come to know and care deeply for each of the individuals engaged in this narrative inquiry. It is because of the relationships we developed, the trust which formed, the experiences we shared, the stories we told, the ways our lives became connected one with another that they continued to live with me.

> This is a book of stories and reflections strung together to suggest a style of learning from experience. Wherever a story comes from, whether it is a familiar myth or a private memory, the retelling exemplifies the making of a connection from one pattern to another: a potential translation in which narrative becomes parable and the once upon a time comes to stand for some renascent truth. (Bateson, 1994, p. 11)

Joining the Parade: Wandering and Wondering Together

I began my research by joining the Gardenview parade, by walking along with other parade participants. I joined this particular parade because Evelyn had initiated conversation with staff about parent voice and involvement, because attending to parents was already a part of the parade. While each of us as parade participants had a place in the parade and was living out "a particular set of stories…at any particular time" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998a, p. 161), we were not following a defined parade route. We were engaged in a process of improvisation, of learning along the way (Bateson, 1994), as we experienced and explored the positioning of parents in relation to the landscape of school.

In the children's story, The Wise Woman and Her Secret (Merriam, 1991), a parade of people formed, winding its way up into the hills to see if the secret of wisdom could be discovered from the wise woman living there. Living out a story of improvisation, a little girl named Jenny found much of interest in a green, tarnished coin found in the well by others, and yet tossed aside. As the wise woman watched Jenny explore the coin with all her senses and listened as Jenny wondered aloud about the coin's many characteristics, she laughed,

> "My dear child, you have found the secret."
>
> Jenny was puzzled. "How can I have found it?"

> "Because, you see, the secret of wisdom is to be curious—to take the time to look closely, to use all your senses to see and touch and taste and smell and hear. To keep on wandering and wondering."
>
> "Wandering and wondering," Jenny repeated softly.
>
> "And if you don't find all the answers, you will surely find more to marvel at in this curving, curling world that spins around and around amid the stars." (Merriam, 1991, unnumbered)

During my year of being a participant in the Gardenview parade, during my year of wandering and wondering with parents and staff, we stumbled upon many 'green, tarnished coins' which stimulated our curiosity. Evelyn's presence in the parade, her openness to having me join in, and her own interest in the coins enabled us to pick the coins up, to stop and explore them with all our senses, to wonder aloud about them, to puzzle over them. In exploring one coin, we came to see the practice of welcoming families; in exploring another, we engaged in advocacy efforts for increased funding for public education. Finding another coin prompted an ongoing dialogue about parent voice and place in class placement decisions, while the discovery of yet others led to an examination of our involvement in a diversity of volunteer activities, and to thoughtful reflection about our participation in the secret garden.

Stepping out of the Parade:
Wandering and Wondering Alone

Stepping out of the parade, after a period of prolonged attending, I had files and drawers full of field notes, artifacts, and transcripts of taped conversations, which reflected my own, and others,' experiences, feelings, sense-making, and coming to know as parade participants. It was now time to compose a research text, a process involving "a continual reimagining of the future and reinterpretation of the past to give meaning to the present" (Bateson, 1989, pp. 29-30), a process of honoring my own, and others', learning in my tellings and retellings.

It was quite a long time after I finished my research at Gardenview before I began to write. I spent time reading transcripts and field notes, reading literature on parent involvement, on school reform, on leadership, trying to clarify what I had come to know so I could write about it. While Jean encouraged me to begin writing, I continued to feel I had not read enough or figured out enough to begin. Roosevelt notes,

> Objects of art—including good stories—are both records of thought and occasions of thought.... Another way of saying this may be to say they are not mere acts of "self-expression."...Dewey can help:
>
> The act of expression that constitutes a work of art is a construction in time, not an instantaneous emission. ...[T]his statement signifies...more than that it takes time. ...It means that the expression of the self in and through a medium, constituting the work of art, is *itself* a prolonged interaction of something issuing from the self with objective conditions, a process in which both of them acquire a form and order they did not at first possess (1934, p. 65). (Roosevelt, 1998, pp. 100-101)

Unconsciously it seems, I understood writing more as an instantaneous emission than as an occasion of thought, than as a prolonged interaction between my self, the medium of language, and the peopled, complex landscapes of Gardenview, PACT, and Michelle's classroom.

As I began to write, I was sometimes surprised at where my writing took me. I began the chapter on welcoming families, feeling I understood what welcoming families meant and believing it would be a quick chapter to write. As I sat at the computer, watching the cursor blink, wondering why the writing was so difficult, I realized how many issues lay beneath the surface of a practice of welcoming families to a school. The wonders which arose—about seeing big and seeing small, about who gets to play, about hospitality, about ownership and who gets to decide—were occasions of thought, of conversation, of re-searching, of prolonged interaction. They were occasions of thought in which what I had come to know was extended, shifted, deepened, enhanced.

> "Prolonged interaction" — including much writing and crossing out and rewriting — brings "form and order": the experienced world — acutely imagined, severely edited into story — becomes newly legible; language achieves a specific, hitherto unrealized, bounded shape; the self acquires a new layer of definition through the activity of *making*, laying down of perception. (Roosevelt, 1998, p. 101)

As I wrote the chapter, the practice of welcoming families became newly legible and I, too, acquired a new layer of definition. As this experience happened chapter after chapter, I came to know what Jean knew — that the personal construction of knowledge is ongoing, that we don't write what we know but we write to know.

In writing to know, I continued to wander and to wonder. Books I read, conversations I engaged in, and continued experiences as a parent in the margins of the school landscape raised new questions for me, created new wonders, caused me to think in different metaphors. I began to see my dissertation as "a place for dangerous ideas — dangerous perceptions, unseemly imaginings, disruptive thoughts" (p. 104). I wanted my writing to attend to the taken-for-grantedness of what lay beyond the images in my photo album — of educators' tendency to see small, and of assumptions about who gets to play, about hospitality, about ownership and "Who decides?" I wanted my writing to attend to the unquestioned positioning of parents in the margins of the school landscape.

Returning to Parade Participants: Sharing the Wonders

Knowing, that as I wrote, my thinking had taken me to new places, I wanted to share my writing with research participants to ensure I re-presented their voices and their stories in ways which they imagined and to seek response to my 'learning along the way.' Participants' responses became further occasions of thought, prolonging our interaction with each other, prolonging our thoughtfulness about the positioning of parents in relation to the school landscape, and prolonging my interaction with the text of this dissertation through processes of revisiting, rethinking and sometimes rewriting.

Evelyn's Response

On occasions when I took writing back to Evelyn, I felt anxious about her response. I was not sure how she would feel about my looking beyond the images, about my problematizing assumptions and practices which position parents in the margins of school landscapes. As we worked our way through some chapters one evening, with me conversing about sections of text which I had marked with sticky notes, Evelyn put down her papers and smiled at me. She reassured me she understood that doctoral work was more than the telling of fairy tales and that the dissertation would not include only smooth, clean stories. Reflecting on our shared research experience, Evelyn said she trusted in my telling. Having spent a great deal of time together, having talked continuously about our thoughts and observations regarding the positioning of parents, having done many things together at Gardenview, Evelyn assured me she had confidence in me as a researcher, in the way I had, and was, living my research life. While she initially felt her participation in this inquiry was high risk, as I would be talking to parents and staff about parent involvement and participation, and potentially hearing stories of her, she said it had not played out that way. She emphasized that because of my presence she began to attend to many things which she had not been conscious of previously and that she had learned from the research experience (field notes, October 23, 2000).

Evelyn's words, and her open and caring response, provided an occasion of thought. "We grow in dialogue, not only in the rare intensity of passionate collaboration, but through a multiplicity of forms of friendship and collegiality" (Bateson, 1989, p. 94). Evelyn helped me see complexity and tension, not as taking away from friendship and collegiality but as adding to it. She helped me to become comfortable with an expanded sense of what it means to be in a research relationship, especially a relationship in which we were all learning along the way.

In telling me my presence prompted her to attend to things to which she had not been attending, I was brought back again to Cohen's first day of school and to how my new positioning as parent enabled me to see schooling differently than I had seen it before. As an educator, immersed in the traditions of schooling, I was not awake to the positioning of parents in relation to the school landscape. "At the center of any tradition, it is easy to become blind to alternatives. At the edges, where lines are blurred, it is easier to imagine the world might be different" (Bateson, 1989, p. 73). Becoming a parent of a school-aged child, moving from the center off the edges of the school landscape, I came to see the world of schooling differently, and became awake to how different that world must be if parents are to have a place on the landscape. Because of her involvement in this narrative inquiry, Evelyn was able to travel outside of her central position on the school landscape to the edges where the lines are blurred and to where new alternatives for reimagining the landscape suddenly become visible. Evelyn's words reminded me of how important it is to awaken educators to seeing schooling through the eyes of parents, to hearing parents' personal narratives of schooling, to shifting educators' focus to the edges of the landscape where lines are blurred and where alternatives are easier to imagine. I hope this dissertation will contribute to that awakening.

Danika's Response

Just as my conversation with Evelyn had created an occasion of thought, so did Danika's e-mailed response to my writing.

> *Thank you for allowing me to read Chapters II and III. I must say it brought tears to my eyes, you captured my thoughts and emotions perfectly. It was interesting to read about the parallels we shared, which I wasn't aware of at the time.*
>
> *Reading your analysis was comforting and certainly has helped me to put those incidents into perspective. Thank you. (personal correspondence, November 15, 2000)*

Danika's response speaks to the power of stories.

> Stories can join the worlds of thought and feeling.... They frequently reveal dilemmas of human caring and conflict, illuminating with the rich, vibrant

> language of feeling the various landscapes in which we meet each other morally. (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 4)

I wonder if I was able to capture Danika's thoughts and emotions "perfectly" because they resonated so strongly with my own. As Danika shared her experiences, I not only heard her stories but I felt them deep inside. Her words pulled forward my own stories and set off a slide show of images flashing rapidly onto a screen inside my head—closed doors, emptying hallways, tear-streaked faces, babysitting co-ops, silent exiting, strained conversations. Danika's stories connected her with me. They called me to consider what I know about the positioning of parents in relation to the landscape of schooling, how I know it, and what and whom I care about in this context (p. 13).

Danika's response, in speaking to the power of stories, also speaks to the power of narrative inquiry as a research methodology. Her words, "Reading your analysis was comforting and certainly has helped me to put those incidents into perspective," demonstrate the educative possibility of living and telling stories, and of retelling and reliving them with new possibilities (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998b). To use Bateson's (1994) quote once again, "Insight, I believe, refers to that depth of understanding that comes by setting experiences, yours and mine, familiar and exotic, new and old, side by side, learning by letting them speak to one another" (p. 14).

Heather's Response

Heather's e-mailed response to Chapter VII created an occasion of thought, followed by an occasion of critical conversation (November 30, 2000), and some rewriting of the text surrounding her participation in the secret garden.

> *...The result of my reflection is that your conclusions on participation do not show the full complexity/expressions of parental participation that I observed in relation to the secret garden. ...I wish to explain further how I understand this concept and why I made the critique I did. I do this in the hopes that we can all learn from it—this is what I mean by learning our way out. I agree with your conclusion that I was a participant. But I saw three ways I could have been a better participant.*
>
> *The decision to focus on the product instead of the learning process, meant that many of my gifts (being a good facilitator of process, inspiring others,*

> *developing vision, and organizing curricular workshops/finding content experts) were not needed. …Therefore, my participation was restricted….*
>
> *The second was finding out what our shared knowledge was and where the gaps were. What we needed was a "disinterested" facilitator that could have brought in everyone's ideas and helped to formulate a vision that integrated different views. As it was, only one view prevailed. This put me in a bind….*
>
> *I had significant constraints upon my participation. …I needed a place to say, "This is all I can do," given my work circumstances. As it was, I felt that I was not pulling my load. When I could not oblige requests made at the last minute, I felt like a delinquent participant. Therefore, there needs to be a place to state parameters parents need to set with regard to their involvement…. (personal correspondence, November 26, 2000)*

Heather helped me to see that in differentiating between involvement and participation, I had inadvertently portrayed participation as something relatively black and white. You are a participant or you are not. In identifying ways in which she could have been a better participant, and a more satisfied participant, Heather shifted my focus to the many shades of grey that fall between being involved and being a participant. Through the words of her e-mail and the words of our critical conversation, Heather enabled me to turn her story and turn it again, gaining a deeper noticing of her positioning as parent participant.

Through her thoughtful and courageous response, Heather caused me to attend once again to the need for critical conversations on school landscapes. In our writing and in our conversation, both Heather and I had the opportunity to learn from speaking and from listening to one another, exploring complexities and contradictions. I believe Heather and I left the conversation with a deeper and richer understanding of parent participation and a greater appreciation of one another's lived experiences, both surrounding and apart from the secret garden project. As a result, I believe Heather and I are more knowing as we move forward to retell and relive the story of parent participation at other times, in other places.

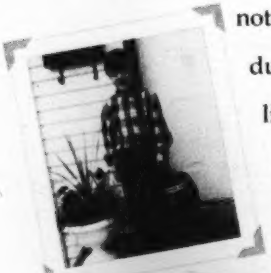
Learning as a Recursive Process

Well, we have come to the end of my photo album. The pages are filled with snapshots and memorybank movies captured both on and off the Gardenview landscape which tell a story of wandering and wondering, of learning along the way.

They tell a story of learning with and from one another as research participants, and then expanding that knowing, as the learning continues to curve and curl back around in a recursive process. Have we found all the answers? No, but we have found more to marvel at, and to puzzle over, as we continue to imagine possibilities for repositioning parents on the landscape of schooling and for changing the landscape of schooling itself.

In this process of unlearning, where we begin to question perceived truths, we have much to marvel at when we see big—when we begin to attend to issues of fantasy, fairness and friendship, when we search for ways for parents and educators to express and connect their knowing. We have much to puzzle over as we imagine ways to create a school landscape on which everyone can play—a landscape where educators and parents can lay their teacher knowledge and their parent knowledge side by side, in the shared endeavor of educating their children and themselves. We have much to marvel at as we begin to see possibilities for shifting the host/guest relationship of educators and parents to one of collaboration in a composite community of practice. We have much to puzzle over as we see leadership as broad-based, embedded in the school landscape rather than the task of one individual. As we continue to live and tell, relive and retell stories of parents' positioning in relation to the landscape of schools, I believe our wandering and wondering will lead us on a curving, curling path toward the repositioning of parents and toward changing school landscapes.

Photo Albums Yet to Fill



As I take one last look through my photo album before I put it away, I can't help noticing how much my children have grown and changed during the three and a half years of my doctoral work. The little boy who stood in the sunshine, holding his backpack, and smiling up at me as he prepared to set off for his first day of kindergarten is now a mature and confident ten year old who straps on his helmet and heads off to school on his rollerblades. The toddlers in the stroller, accompanying me on my trips back and forth to school to drop off or pick up Cohen, are now students themselves, engaged in learning to read and write. So much has changed.

Yet so much has stayed the same. As a parent, I am still being asked to fill out the parent volunteer form indicating my preference of laminating, photocopying or working in the library. I am still being reminded, in my children's school newsletter, to make sure my children arrive at school on time and to set goals with my children for the upcoming school term (school newsletter, December, 2000). I am still sending my children to a school program in which I have no voice. I am still signing their agenda books each night and spending my evenings ensuring their homework is done, regardless of the value of the homework to them or to me and regardless of the other possible family activities it is preempting. While my children are developing and changing, my positioning as a parent in relation to the landscape of schooling is not. I continue to find myself marginalized and silenced. I continue to find myself doing the tasks which educators deem important for my children's education. The contrast is vivid. It makes apparent the urgency of attending, in our research agendas, to the positioning of parents in relation to the landscape of schooling.

I have an empty album here I hope will someday be filled with snapshots and memorybank movies which tell stories of parent knowledge. Similar research to Connelly and Clandinin's on teachers' personal practical knowledge (1988) has yet to do be done on parent knowledge. What is parents' personal practical knowledge? How can we begin to learn about it? Presently in schools, educators are tending to capitalize on parents' professional or craft knowledge, knowledge gained through education, training or work experience. In attending solely to professional knowledge, educators are tending to credit parents who are formally educated and employed as having knowledge and are tending to discredit parents who have limited education and/or who are unemployed as lacking parent knowledge. When we begin to attend to personal practical knowledge, what might we discover about parent knowledge? What might we learn about the knowledge parents hold of teaching and learning, knowledge which arises from their day to day lived experiences with children?

Home schooling is a growing phenomenon in our province and our country. Increasing numbers of parents are choosing to school their children rather than have them schooled by professional educators in formal institutions. In such situations, where parents are playing both the cat and the fish roles of parent and teacher, what might we learn about parent knowledge? How does the personal practical knowledge of parents in home schooling situations come into play in the education of their children? Home schooling may be an interesting place to learn about parent knowledge.

I have another album here I hope will someday be filled with snapshots and memorybank movies which tell stories of parents' side by side positioning with educators on the landscape of schooling. What might we learn in a research site where educators are willing to shift positioning from that of protectors and holders of knowledge to one of co-educators? What might we learn in a site of shared leadership or in a composite community of practice?

I have yet another album which I hope will someday be filled with snapshots and memorybank movies which tell new stories of teacher education. What might a preservice curriculum look like that attends to the positioning of parents in relation to school landscapes? How do we help preservice educators imagine new possibilities for working side by side with parents in the schooling of children?

As my gaze rests on the photo album I just closed and on the empty albums resting beside it, I feel like Jenny holding the green, tarnished coin from the well. So many questions continue to emerge for me, so many wonders are still unanswered. So much research is yet to be done. I guess the only certainty is the need to keep on wandering and wondering.

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